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SALLY
SANDY MARRIED
OLD ANDY

A MIXED PACK

BY

DOROTHEA CONYERS

AUTHOR OF

"SANDY MARRIED," "OLD ANDY," ETC. ETC.

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
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LONDON

Colonial Library

First Published in 1915

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A MIXED PACK

A MIXED PACK

I

FATHER FITZROY FLANNAGAN

THE country people called him Father Flannagan with due respect, but to us hunting people he grew to be little "Father Fitz," a reverend transgressor of the rules of the field. Only a curate, with the love of horses and hunting deep-bedded in his merry heart. A small red-headed little fellow, absolutely fearless; a perpetual smile channelling his freckled face. Grinning, he rode some mad thoroughbred over the great Cahervalley banks; grinning wider he took his falls; happier still he got up again to ride, mad jealous of every man until he was once more beside the pack. Bad-scenting days, hunting runs, good hound-work, chafed him sorely; one could see him fretting for his gallop.

Fate and his Bishop ordained that Father Fitz should be appointed to a parish on a wind-swept hillside, with the cream of the best grass country in the world lying all round and a racing stable

nestling in the hollow at the foot of the village. No man could say he neglected his duties or his sick, yet every spare moment was devoted to the horses he adored. A feather-weight, a glutton for pace, he would ride 'chasers and nothing else—either his own or the trainer Manly's, who lent to him freely. No paid lad would have risked his neck so recklessly.

He came out once or twice almost unnoticed, a mere little priest on a pulling brute which backed and kicked at its fences in slow hunts. Even then his grin was unfailing, and his determination to have the biggest place in each bank for himself was firm.

Soon we learnt his frantic jealousy, his unshaken good humour, the keenness which made a quarrel impossible. About a month after he started hunting we ran from Freshford Wood—hounds slipped us, and McMurrough, I remember, got away with a field's lead, by himself. I was coming near, going quickly, hoping to pick up when I had nursed my horse through the soft ground, when splash! rush! dashed by Father Fitz on Tipperary Lass, a weedy chancy brute; his grin at its widest, his eyes afire. The mare could gallop: in another field he was level with McMurrough, and going at the same bank. Then the fun began. The little priest pulled out right-handed, his coat-tails flying, until, with a hawk's swiftness, he swooped straight into McMurrough, bumped him hard, and jumped the fence.

I was near enough to see Father Fitz's wide grin of joy, to hear the other's full-voiced amazed fury.

The blast blew over a heedless head. Hounds were absolutely racing, the men galloped side by side, pressing their horses through the bog, until at the next fence, just as wildly, Father Fitz pulled out, dashed in, bumped and jumped. . . . For a mile or more, sheer wild jealousy driving him, this went on, until McMurrough was worn out, and Father Fitz's grin was wider than ever. I rode behind, too stricken with laughter to think of hunting. Then we checked. I saw McMurrough, white with fury, gather breath to explain, with clear venom-laden words, what he thought; but ere he could say much Father Fitz turned the full beam of his grin upon the local man.

"'Twas a fine hunt, an' quick," he said. "You bested us at the start. I declare to goodness but that little horse of yours really had the legs of me! Did you ever think to race him now?"

Words of awful import, grin-strangled, died unborn. For a space McMurrough, primed with very just wrath, stared as one who wished looks could kill; then a faint, hopeless smile grew on his lips.

As they hit it off I saw McMurrough's eyes, still hopeless, dwelling on Father Fitz; but as that little man dashed Tipperary Lass at a wide drain and took his place right-handed, McMurrough drew a deep breath, and with vicious wrench of bridle and dig of spurs went wide to the left and stayed there, although it was clearly not the riding of the run.

We got used to him after that; to his wildness, his

intolerance of a leader, his habit of jumping straight on your back and falling over you with a happy grin if you went down. The curse died on one's lips as, bumped and jumped on, you turned to see the wide-smiled red-topped perpetrator of the crime. He rode with his eyes glued to hounds; and was reckless of the obstacles he encountered. How the weedy fourth-rate racers got through or over some of the fences they were put at was one of the unsolved mysteries. He never looked what he was going at.

I remember one day we ran from Killeen Gorse, over the flat lands between it and Ballyhall, and crossed, running fast, the Murroe road. As I jumped in I saw the little Father, grinning, seeing red—bent on passing me—absolutely racing at the fence on to the road, a rather high bank masked by a straggling thorn hedge. The nastiness of the jump was his affair, but just where he must land stood a dogcart drawn up—his driver a man whose temper was well known, and whose fighting-weight was sixteen stone.

I yelled warning wildly. As well have cooed plover calls. The view of a couple of stragglers and my voice acted as spur and whip. Little Father Fitz cheered high in happy echo, waving his hand ahead; full gallop his pulling chestnut came on, swept the bank, and dashed straight into the back of the cart—though the owner standing on the seat was plain for all to see.

There were mingled sounds of rending wood, of pounding hoofs, of shouted curses, and somewhere

an undercurrent of mild surprise which told that Father Fitz lived. But as the chaos cleared he lay limp on the road, very still, streaked with blood and dirt; while over him, a roaring gale of fury shaking the air, the dogcart's driver brandished his ready whip.

"The length of the fence to choose from—plain to see—taking the road like a hurdle . . . the something . . . something . . ." he foamed with bitter truth, while we lifted the little priest and carried him farther away. As a flask touched his lips he cautiously opened an eye—the grin commenced to crease his white cheeks.

"I thought it better to lie low," he whispered, softly. "Of course I heard ye call, but didn't I think ye were hastenin' me? . . ." Then as he sat up his eyes grew moist from sorrow—they rested on the dogcart's owner, endeavouring to tie the remains together with straps and ropes, and we thought due contrition had touched him.

"But wasn't he the curmudgeon to be in me way? I just makin' up for a toss, an' hounds flyin' an' all," he said, sadly, and fainted in reality. Poor Father Fitz was in bed for a month.

I don't know if it was this adventure, the tales of his prowess in the hunting field, or whispered scandals of early gallops with Manly and lathered horses bringing him back just in time to say mass. It may have been all three, but they moved him from the good country to Tullagh, where a network of stone walls laces across the crop of crags, and where

a run may be over a grass line, but is more likely to develop into a scramble amongst bush-hidden rocks. Still, the little man, though Manly's racers were his no longer, came out undeterred, scuttering and stepping across the stones, leading us gallantly where hounds went. It was a sight then to see him drive at the loose grey walls, taking them all in his stride, a cloud of stones rattling in his wake.

Fate sent him a legacy, and with it he promptly bought two horses which he raced with zeal. He was suddenly missed out hunting about January, and I heard he had gone to Rome—sent there, no doubt, that racing might be forgotten. In the beginning of February, as I was driving one day with a friend, we met him, just returned. My friend was in a hurry, suddenly remembered a forgotten "stop" for the morrow, and, pulling up, asked Father Fitz to see to it.

"Look here," he raised his short fingers, "these hands 'll do it; I'll go now. And here I am," he burst out wrathfully, "just back from Rome an' not one of the horses fit."

Poor Father Fitz! He smiles on us, rides at us—annoys and delights us no more. I fear he owes his present banishment to this last story, which was told to me by one of the priests present at the dinner.

There was a mission at Ballysteen, a town close to the little man's parish, and he was of course there at the large lunch or dinner which was given when the Bishop came down. Now, the Bishop of Tul-

lown, though he does not ride, yet shares Father Fitz's weakness for horseflesh, and breeds blood stock for sale—a fad perhaps not strictly bishoplike, and not one spoken of before a gathering of his religious children, for he is a stern little man.

The lunch drew to its close, and the men of the order which had held the mission spoke happily of its successes. So many had come to mass—taken the pledge—joined his lordship's own temperance league—Ballysteen was a town steeped in holiness. The tale of these well-earned victories ran happily from lip to lip as each priest addressed the autocratic little prelate, and earned a smile from his stern lips. A moment's silence fell, during which Father Fitz, who had been seated wrapped in reverie, suddenly caught the bishop's eye.

"Your lordship!" he called, speaking fast. The heads turned to listen for Father Fitz's tale of success: "Your lordship—that little horse I bought from you last month is turning out a beauty; I'll pull him out at Oonagh on Tuesday, and I declare I think he'll win."

The silence which fell now was one which could be felt, for the Bishop made no answer, and through it all Father Fitzroy Flannagan grinned unconscious of ill, beaming as one who has given the best news of the day, and who for himself was near his heart's desire. It was not difficult to see where his thoughts had been during luncheon.

He disappeared a month later, and lives now on the bare sea-coast, far from the melody of his be-

loved hounds, with no hope of feeling the west wind on his red face as he thrusts his way in a quick half-hour, his well-bred horse striding beneath him. But I hear he keeps his 'chasers still, training them as he rides long distances in the thinly housed lands.

We can ride now without danger of the black coat brushing at our knees as we jump, or the appalling view of a thoroughbred rising in our tracks as we roll over. Yet I think we would risk it again if little Father Fitz might return to cheer us with his never-ceasing grin.

•

II

IS IT WORTH IT ?

ROAR of wind outside, crackle of rain against the window. Someone opens the shutters and the grey dreariness of a wild December morning noses into the room. A match splutters, then the tiny yellow flame of a candle lightens the chill and the gloom. A cup of hot tea gives sufficient courage for a look at the weather. Heavy clouds are stealing sullenly across the sky, a faint peep of blue behind their ragged edges. A storm of rain lashes the sodden earth. The trees moan and creak drearily to the rush of the wind. The meet is sixteen miles away, one must start at nine to reach it, and what a morning for a drive ! Visions rise of warm rooms and blazing fires, of a cosy armchair and a book ; for the clouds mount and meet and the morning darkens. But the horses are on, and it is fox-hunting : one never knows what the day may bring forth. Cold water makes the clouds look lighter ; then a hasty breakfast, snatched in a cold dining-room : fires never light well on a hunting morning.

The trap comes round, and the rain comes down,

in a blinding, lashing sheet of grey. Is everything in? Whip, change of clothes, flask? Blackberry, the cob, stands with tucked-down tail and shivering chilled quarters; then, when given leave, he starts with a plunge, and off alone for a sixteen-mile drive with the wind in one's teeth. The big trees on the avenue fling down a vicious shower as we spin out the gate, and the cob tears up the wide, empty road.

Sodden green country all round. Sleepy people peer from the cottages, drenched hens eye us dejectedly, drenched cocks crow optimistic untruths every time a peep of light breaks through the clouds. The cob splashes through the puddles, and lays back his ears to breast a fresh storm of wind and rain. Five miles slip past, six, seven, and we turn off the wide road to plunge deep into the desolate country. A big hill rises in the near distance, the clouds thick on its summit; beyond is another range of hills purple and dim. Just beyond this second range lies the meet.

The sky has cleared a little—patches of washed blue show behind the grey; then out comes the sun, glinting coldly on to the wet earth. A trap in front on the narrow road, another coming up behind: it is comforting to know that there are more fools than one in the world—more fox-hunters, with hats shoved over their noses, going damply to seek for pleasure.

Past a belt of firs, creaking dismally; it is a wood which we run to at times. How big the fences look

to-day! What horse could top that stone-faced bank and land safely into the road? It would be sheer riding for a fall. Yet we've done it more than once, and thought nothing of it, as hounds ran across the road. Some slight shelter afforded by a turn in the road is left behind; the wind meets us as a thing new-loosed, a fresh shower lashes our faces. The rain soaks in now, drips down one's collar, chills and depresses. "Is it worth it?" comes the unbidden thought. "Is anything worth this discomfort?" We shake the raindrops from a chilled, lilac-hued nose, beat numbed fingers against each other, and the answer is in the negative.

A steep hill runs up through the street of a dirty little village; our horse waits here at the gate of the so-called hotel. But to-day ten minutes more in the trap is desirable, and the groom has to ride on to the meet. Blackberry casts a longing look at the gate, then trots on somewhat dejectedly: he had thought his journey over. The hunter splashes behind.

A last stretch of road bordered by high green banks, with ditches brimming with muddy brown water; then at last the meet. About twenty horses being led up and down under the dripping trees, the hounds grouped behind a house in a forlorn bunch. Everyone looks cold and cheerless; a reek rises from the horses; people cling to their traps until the last minute. There are few pink coats to brighten the scene, everyone has muffled himself up in sombre waterproofs, though for the

moment the rain is over, and the watery sunshine gleams on the earth. Then move on, into the saddle, and gather up the wet reins; give your horse a savage chuck, as he attempts to buck; splash along the wet road under the shelter of a heather-grown hill; turn, scrambling up a rough track, and wait shivering on the hillside while hounds work through the covert.

The hill stretches black and bleak all round, the rain driving grey along its sides; our respite was not a long one. Below, miles of valley; here and there a house or a group of trees. Beyond, a range of mountains, dully purple, under the lowering sky. Desolation, dreariness, and a handful of men and horses out on the hillside, searching for enjoyment.

A sudden chorus, a red body darting across the rutted track. "Yoo-i-i! over, over!" and up after them to the top of the hill. We all scramble blindly along, save a few very wise men who wait in the shelter—for if one does not get to the top there is always the chance that the hunt may be down the far side. Horses sob at the steep ascent, stumble and slip in heather and stony ground. But what's this? A shout back. Our fox has wheeled for Firwood, right along the hills, a bad line, leading to a worse.

Gallop on after the vanishing pack, breathing—well, not blessings as we go. Out over a rotten fence, and land among the waiting wise men, then drag along the bare hilltop. Hounds hunting slowly

on a catchy, uncertain scent. The hill is fenced with walls, walls which have little ditches to them into which horses flounder ; there are loose boulders to land on, and many chances for a lame horse, none whatever for a hunt. The day seems to grow colder, as we canter dejectedly towards the big dark wood. Hounds top the high fence and are in ; the wood echoes to them. The heather grows in masses on this hill, and there are deep holes here and there, and patches of squelching bog, and high, rotten fences. A road cuts the wood in two ; beyond is a straggling patch of gorse. A shout from the road, " He's over ! " We bolt for the gate, up to the covert, force him through, and away on the hill. Someone goes down with a crash in the heather ; someone falls at a rotten bank—there is not a sound one to be found. The rain soaks down. Then—tally-ho back—we make again for the wood, skirting a deep quarry, the horses sliding on their tails down a narrow steep path on to the road. We circle round and round, hunting a ringing cowardly brute, only fit to die. Round again, dreary half-sheltered delays at the wood, rain-swept pauses at the gorse, with a stumbling rush across the heather in between.

The cold ground carries little scent ; we can never bustle our fox ; it all seems hopeless—a hunting nightmare which may run into the dusk. At last the Master rings a welcome note. " Co-ome away ! " toots across the heather and echoes in the wood. " Co-ome away ! " steals faintly back from behind

the hill. The whips bustle. Hounds, disgusted, troop out of the wood.

"We'll try Dillon's Hill," says the Master, and—we are so tired of hills!

Firwood House holds some consolation. Small strong drinks send a welcome glow of comfort through chilled frames. Then away again, with a faint gleam of hope renewed, a jog of four miles on to Dillon's. High banks, thick with a tangle of thorn, border our road. The green valley stretches away to our left. The sky has cleared; pearly clouds flit across it, ousting the sullen grey. We jog along a little more contentedly, moving soaked shoulders and dreaming sometimes of a distant fireside, then scramble up the hill into Dillon's. The wet wind meeting us chills us afresh. A faint whimper cheers us. Silence. A waiting group on the green hillside, every eye on the gorse. The whimper rises and falls, yet never swells. A man, breathless, comes flying up, his hat waving.

"He's away, sir. He passed me, an' he's sneakin' off down the hill. A big ould felly, makin' for Carrick."

Then all was scurry. "Which way? which way?" Hounds flashing out of covert. Thunder of hoofs on the turf. Our guide fleeting in front. An over-zealous field pressing the Master. It is a glorious line to Carrick, some five miles away. Who says it is not worth it now?

Whimper, a gathering of eager heads, a consultation as it were, then, "There it is!" Hounds flash

away down the hill and we slide after them, always with the valley in front, and the best country in the world to be ridden over. Then . . . the weather does its work. The "ould felly" has been gone some time; the sodden ground carries no scent. Now Patience has it, now Sunbeam; anon they fling up puzzled heads, and then again hope rises; for a moment we gallop, then silence. The Master tries a flying cast forward; it fails. Perhaps the "ould felly" has changed his mind and has gone some other way. He casts round, tries every inch, but fortune declines to smile; he shakes a hopeless head. That hunt, never properly begun, is over. We are down in the low-lying fields, Dillon's towering black above us. The shadows are creeping up, in another hour it will be dark. Heads droop dejectedly, the wet chills afresh; horses pace slowly over the spongy turf, jump in slovenly fashion a low wide bank with an unpleasantly wide ditch. We gather, beaten, by a hedge.

"We'll try Boogawn," says the Master, with a vague attempt at cheeriness; "run hounds through—we have to pass it." He speaks, but the field do not respond. Heads are shaken; people have had enough. Those who are near home go there, and only a few whose road lies past the covert go on with the hounds.

Boogawn lies by the road; a little patch of gorse, sometimes run into, never a good chance of a find. We hump up discontentedly, talking of the long ride home, as hounds pour in. Yet they have

scarcely disappeared over the low fence when we hear a shout, and a big dog fox slips away beneath our feet, pointing his mask straight for Burrows Gorse and for home. The moist wind whips across the gorse, wrinkles the pools on the road, the line is up it, and scent may hold. It does. In a wave hounds pour out, and after one bloodthirsty burst settle in deathly silence on the line. Mute and fleet they slip across the pasture, almost like a phantom pack racing into the dusk.

A low fly off the road to give us courage. A sound field; horses, slovenly no longer, stretch out; chilled blood warms and glows. Hounds dash on—one must gallop to live with them. It is up wind and their fox is close before them. There are but ten of us left out; no crowding at the fences, no waiting of turns at the gaps. A big sound bank; on, and off with the “shoot” of a good hunter into the field beyond. Steady now, across a low-lying field, the moist ground churning up to our horse’s hocks; out of it over a high stone wall with a stick laid on the top. There is a glimpse of a gate in a corner, but the pace is too good to fumble with bolts. Double a narrow bank, gallop hard for an open ditch. The shadows lengthen as we fly on, but who thinks of darkness? The flying pack strain in front, the fences are sound. It is a gallop to remember.

“One moment.” The Master’s hand up. Hounds fling up their heads as they overrun the line. They spread out, searching every inch of ground. Horses

sob as we draw rein, for the pace has been of the best. What if it should be over now—if we again fail to hit it off ? Out of the shadowy hedge dives a shadowy figure, trailing brambles in his wake ; the thorns crackle to his onset. “ Here, here ! He had turned sharp here, thin round again, away for Burrows Hill. The biggest felly iver ye saw, an’ he near to strhike me in the dark, with the tongue an’ the tail hangin’ on him.”

Waving a ragged cap, the figure indicates the turn. He lands handsomely in the ditch, and would be away yelling on the line, but he is checked. Now old Patience has it ; she flings her well-known note ; the pack swarm to her. Now Bluebell speaks. They have hit it off ; hearts beat in echo to the cry for blood. On again, wheeling out at right angles over the fence which the shadow had sprung through—a nasty unsafe spot in broad daylight, with its lacing tangle of thorns and broad ditch at the taking-off side—a veritable trap now. Yet slipping, splashing, we are over, and one wet coat is the count. Not quite so fast now ; and this is as well, for the dusk falls fast. Over another awkward fence ; someone down, someone diving wildly for a stirrup at the far side. The valley stretches before us, an upward slope telling us that the ascent to Burrows has begun. Hounds slip on ahead, the moist wind comes in our faces, our blood glows to the glory of the gallop, to the ripple and swing of the horse’s stride—that sense of the mastery of life which hunting brings. Nostrils are

wide now, white foam lies along heaving flanks, but there are always the swiftly cocked ears as we come to a fence, the snatch at the bit, the powerful easy bound for a wall, the steady change on a bank, the light spring into the next field, the rider vowing, as every man vows over every good hunter, that there never was a horse like this one.

Darker and darker. The Master's voice, close to us, calls out jubilantly, "What a gallop! The best we've had this year. Though we shall never see to get into Burrows."

It has been almost, if not quite, the run of the year. We have flung eight miles behind us, with only one short check. Horses begin to sob as the hill grows steeper. It looms dark above us, and there is rough ground between us and the gorse. One must ride close to hounds or they would soon be lost in the dimness. Then . . . hounds bay wildly round an open drain . . . our gallop is over.

"I'd like to have pulled him down." The Master descends and lays a discontented eye to the hole. "But we must leave him there now. Come, my ladies!"

Disappointed, wistful faces look at him. They have done their best: they look for help now. They have striven for blood, and it is not to be theirs. There was little time to fall. The muddy coats surge up quickly from the background, and home is the cry. The hunt was assuming the proportions of a moonlight steeplechase—minus the moon.

Out on to the road again, carefully searching for gaps as we go. Hounds settle to their pattering jog ; other people trot on, calling out cheery good-nights. On under the shadow of a beetling hill, the wind behind, our bodies glowing warmly.

Chatter and chatter again of the run—of our luck, of the fence which had brought one man down, the wrong turn another had taken, the pace which we had come across those stretches of pasture. Round by the roaring swollen river, across the bridge into Ballin village. Lights across the darkness, gleam of cheery fire, dry clothes, then hot tea and mighty rounds of buttered toast, and a sense of fatigued well-being, of rest well earned. If one had stayed at home all this would have been missed. The fire would have been a mere friend, not a glowing lover. There would have been no sense of happy lassitude, no lungs filled with cold fresh air, no tale of the merry gallop when the weary day was quickly forgotten. Hoofs sound outside. The horses are going home. Then Blackberry frets at the door, spurning the “Aisy nows!” of the youth who clings to his bridle.

Into the trap again, and away into the darkness, the wind behind, the rain over. Certainly it, was worth it after all !

III

THE MOTH

[*Note by the Authors.*—"The strange occurrence here related actually took place. The railway was the Milwaukee and Waltham Road, between Pembina and Granite Bluff. The bridge was the trestle bridge across the Menominee River. The driver's real name was William Vanass, and his wife was taken ill and died, as here described."]

WHEN I was stationed in Sierra Leone I met and became friends with a man called Bill Summers, a muscular, flaxen-headed Englishman, imbued with the roving spirit and quick mastery of detail which makes it so hard for a man to succeed. If a beginner takes a month or more to learn a trade thoroughly, he thinks before he leaves it to embark upon something fresh, and, consequently, the plodder rises slowly, while the man of brilliant brain learns one thing and another, and drags his days out in spasmodic bursts of prosperity and long spurts of wants.

Bill Summers had been everything: farmer, sailor, engineer, gold-miner, cook; his lean, nervous hands were as good at tossing an omelette as they were light upon the most intricate machinery. Now

he was taking a rest, having found a fair seam in the gold-mines, and was trying his hand at exploiting the vegetable wealth of Africa.

He did well, too, but he got tired of it in two years, and flitted off as engineer again. He was a born wanderer. He had made a pleasant little place of his bungalow, cleared rigorously all round, so that what air there was came freshly; and he had furnished the house quite luxuriously.

Bill had asked me up for a week, and as I looked round his room I saw a large moth beautifully mounted in a sandal-wood case, hanging over his writing-table.

It was fine, but white, a common species, and, strolling over to look at it, I wondered why he kept it.

"Wondering at that?" he said, as he puffed at his pipe. "I never go about without it, Grey. It's got a waterproof case when I'm aboard ship—it's to be buried with me when I die." His voice sounded strangely sad.

"Yes?" I said, full of curiosity. "Yes?" But he made no answer. "Ever hear," I went on, looking at the moth, whose wings were singed in places, "of what the natives say here—when men die their souls go into moths?"

"No." He started suddenly. "No—I—never heard that, Grey." Looking at him I saw he had gone white under the coppery tan, and his hands were clenched.

I guessed I had trenched on forbidden ground,

so, leaving the moth alone, went on talking of Africa's strange customs and superstitions.

"Why, up country," I said, "far up the yellow rivers with their eternal smell of mangoes, I suppose there are tribes which are as cruel and savage as ever."

"Oh, it's a queer country," he said, looking beyond his cleared garden to the ring of dense bush, broken by the towering cotton trees, and beyond it the dim outline of mountains, blue in the shimmering haze. "But there are strange things in all lands," he went on, dreamily, his eyes on the big moth. "One cannot say whence they come or whither they go. Yet——" The man's face changed to an expression of intense sadness; one caught a glimpse of the hidden sorrow which would never let him rest.

"I'll tell you about it," he said, suddenly, nodding towards the moth, "though it's a thing I have never spoken of."

He sat lost in thought for a moment, and then began :—

I was, as I've told you, one of the many who have to do for themselves. My boyhood was a happy one, and I was trained, in accordance with my own wish, as an engineer, when my father died suddenly, taking almost all his income with him. There was the usual family break-up, and I was shipped to Canada with a pittance in my pocket-book and the customary directions behind me to become a millionaire at once. Oh! one can do so much in a great

strange land with inexperience and fifty pounds ; I was as full of high hopes as those I had left behind me. Of course, I was cheated of half my little store ; the dream of becoming a millionaire or even a moderate success faded for ever, but I was quick to learn, and got regular employment on the Canadian Pacific. It meant enough to eat and the right to live, which was a great deal to me, and I rose to engine-driver in quite a short time.

I met Jenny there—he spoke her name with difficulty. She was a lady ; but, poor as I was, when I asked her she faced the idea of life in a cottage as an engine-driver's wife quite happily. How we planned out our lives ! There was nothing to wait for, and we were married at once. We had enough to live on, a comfortable little home, and if—if she had lived on I should be out there still instead of being the wanderer I have turned into. But that does not matter.

We were married in October, and in April my girl fell ill. It was fever—what, I hardly know, for she never saw a doctor, but she was very bad. It took all my extra money to buy her soup and jellies, and I could not even afford to hire a nurse, so that I spent many anxious hours with her when I was at home.

I was running the regular night express from Koolnay to Bloville then, and the early morning squatters' train back from Bloville to Koolnay, so I was always pretty tired when I got in about seven. When Jenny was well she had breakfast ready, and

I used to turn in and sleep like a log for a few hours so as to be fresh for the night run.

Now my poor little girl lay panting in illness. She was well-born herself, but I never heard her grumble at our life. As I say, she was in some kind of fever, with fits of shivering and lassitude. When I came in she was worn out from a long, lonely night, and instead of resting, I had to tidy up the cottage, get her some hot tea, and some breakfast for myself. My rest was only snatched; I could not bear to leave her for a minute during the day, and it was impossible to ask for leave off at night, for they were short-handed on the line, and a man who goes off his job is very likely to be told he can stay—for good. So I nursed my girl and ran my trains until, practically without sleep for three days and nights, my head began to feel as if there was an iron band round it, my mouth was dry and my eyes aching, as I brewed myself some coffee and started out on the third night of her illness.

Jenny was weak but fairly easy, promising me pitifully that she would sleep and be quite well in the morning.

Dear girl. How she must have dreaded those long, lonely nights! I left milk and water beside her, and some cooling medicine I had got from town, kissed her little, shrunken face, and swung away.

“I watch for you, Bill, on the runs,” she said, in a wandering voice, just as I went out. “I watch for you, dear.”

The thaws of spring were with us; the ground

was a great slush, and every river a roaring, icy torrent, swollen with bitter snow-water. The night was drizzly and misty, and I stumbled through it, rubbing my aching eyes. My head felt as if the inside had been taken out and nothing but a cavity left. Want of sleep with a job in front of you when every sense must be alert is a very hard thing to bear. My heart was like lead as I got to the engine and found Jack, my fireman, stoking up.

Outside, the drizzle had turned to a white, thick fog—clinging clammily to the world.

“How’s the missus, Bill?” Old Jack put up his red, coal-streaked face.

“Bad, Jack,” I said, quietly. “Bad.”

“We haven’t got too much time, either, and you look worn out yourself,” he said. “Cheer up, Bill, them fevers wears out by themselves mostly on the third day—they burns that high they can’t go on.”

“No?” I said, and I shuddered. What if it burnt away the little flickering life?

“Can’t you insist on a relief?” he asked.

I laughed drearily. “To insist would mean the shove out, Jack,” I said, “and I can’t be out of work, now, of all times—the little wife wants so much.”

I forgot how tired I was as I ran round my big engine, oiling, wiping, testing; seeing that she was ready for her long run. Then I jumped into the cab, pulled upon the throttle, and backed the engine, snorting furiously, down to the waiting line of carriages. She was a powerful engine, able to do

her sixty if I asked her, and sweet-tempered as my Jenny. Our engines are live things to us drivers, you know. Sometimes I think there are brains under their great hoods.

At the faint jar of the snorting buffers and the leap of the porters to couple up, I saw I was barely up to time. It was a long, tough run at night; everything was in order for it, but my head swam emptily and my eyes blinked once or twice, despite myself; the fog, too, had made the night heavy. It clung clammily, blurring the station lights. There was a small crowd upon the platform, and I saw the superintendent fussing and bowing as he ushered some men to a reserved carriage. Then he left them and came quickly across to me.

I opened my eyes resolutely. He was an ill-tempered fellow, and we were all afraid of him.

"Those are the M.P.'s and Lord Dalgrace from England," he said, "going to Bloville to connect with the express to Ottawa. It's a raw, thick night, Summers, but you must run her through it. Bring her in up to time. Missus better, I hope?"

"No," I said, dully. "And she wants me there. If you could give me a couple of days off, sir."

"Impossible just now," he said, carelessly. "Bates is down with pleurisy and Jack Denver has broken his leg. We want every hand we have—or"—he looked at me ominously—"we could get fresh ones up from Montreal."

‡ That hint was enough. I turned away sick at heart, pulled the throttle open, and, with a scream

of joy, the train swooped out into the bitter, white mist. Running an express at night is no light work. It's not only keeping to the steel rails, as people seem to think, but watching, looking out for every signal, dreading lest a stray cow upon the line may wreck the human freight in our care. And my whole thoughts were back in the little cottage. I had to force myself to the look-out—the fog blurred the glass, and Jack and I had to strain our eyes as we roared past small stations, to see the flashing whiteness of line clear and no blur of angry red to stop our way.

The engine was running, as she always did, like a dream, hauling the cars up the inclines with superb ease, floating down the gradients. Sleepless as I was, I felt my heart throb for pride in her as we came past Black Springs and ran the long flat before the steep pull of Shole Hill.

Jack took the left, I the right, our eyes fixed upon the blur of wet radiance which our head-lights slashed from the gloom, and then I cried out in amazement. Against the fog in front I saw the gigantic shape of a woman waving her arms at us—waving them methodically, straight out to her shoulders, drop down, and straight out again—drop. It is the Canadian human signal to stop, known as “waving a train down.”

Instinctively my fingers turned to shut off steam, then I stared again and drew a long breath—the figure was too large to be human, nor could anyone stand so long before our tearing onrush. With a

glance at Jack, who was staring out steadily and quietly, I brushed my tired eyes and groaned.

I must knock off engine-driving, if my sleepless brain was to bring me these visions of the night.

But I ran her a little too easily across the stretch of flat, and Jack turned to look at me. Shole Hill was a long, steep gradient, and after we topped that there was a steep descent and a wide curve over the Slaveboy Bridge, with the river roaring in high flood against it.

"See anything?" Jack asked. "Better get up a bit for the hill, eh?"

"I—it was a shadow," I said, uneasily, and let my beauty go again. Lord, how she flung herself at the black night, her head-lights nosing into the gloom as she tore along.

But we had only run two miles more of the flat, when out of the fog the form loomed out again. Arms up—dropped. Up—dropped. A monster woman waving us down.

Jack was stoking up then, the glow of the red-hot coal upon his face.

"For God's sake!" I cried, "Jack. Here! What's ahead?"

He dropped his shovel and sprang to his side of the cab.

"Nothing—dead clear," he called out. "What's up, Bill?"

"Someone—waving us down," I said. "Out ahead in the fog. I've seen her twice, Jack. A woman—stopping us."

"There's no one," he said, and pulled a flask from his pocket. "Take a nip, old chap. You're dead worn out from anxiety and a want o' rest, and you're thinking o' your missus. Sit down and let me run her for a stretch, old man."

I took a mouthful of the fiery spirit, but I shook my head and kept my fingers on the lever. The engine must have her own master.

"It's not that," I said, huskily. "It's Jenny, Jack. She said she'd watch. She's died since I came out. Oh, she's died since I came out, and that's her ahead." I think I sobbed a little in my sheer misery.

"Another nip," he said. Poor old greaser Jack, it was all he could think of to help me. "That's imagination," he said, sharply, "just from want of sleep. Let her out now for the hill, Bill."

He ran back to his glowing furnace, slipping easily along the rocking cab. How little the sleepy, grumbling passengers think of the two men crouching in the cab as we tear through the night.

I put the engine at the climb, and she went for it with her great heart working, but half-way up the figure was there again. Looming gigantic—arms out—dropped—out—dropped again—waving us down, excitedly, insistently, as if angry at my lack of notice. It was too much then—I shut off steam and crammed on brakes half-way up the steep climb. The engine chafed as a horse hard held, the wheels gritting on the rails—but I did not whistle for back brakes, as yet.

"Bill—are you crazy?" Jack sprang to my side. "On the hill, too, man!"

"No; it was the figure," I said. "She's there, Jack, waving us down. It means something."

His hard red face grew suddenly thoughtful, but he pushed my hand from the brakes.

"Don't stop her, Bill," he implored, peering out into the white swirl at the left side. "There's nothing on the line. The inspector will only come along and say you're drunk—that stuff I gave you smells still." He leant out and peered back. "I see his lamp out already; he's on the footboard. Get on, or it will mean losing your job—there's *nothing* ahead, man."

I put up the brakes slowly, and my poor engine, loosed once more, took the hill at the exhaust—every puff from her overwrought self a bitter remonstrance to me.

"Look out—sharp, Jack!" I cried, as we slowly gathered way. "It must be a warning. Look ahead, man!"

He had caught a little of my anxiety as we toiled and grunted up the hill, and, having topped it, there was the long, steep gradient with us to the Slaveboy Valley, then the flat bit, and double right and left curve before the Slaveboy Bridge.

The engine could take her breath now after her toil—the slope was practically with her through the tunnel at the other side of the bridge and into Edmonton, where we stopped.

We went dizzily down, swooping into the white dimness until the cars rocked.

Jack looked at the clock. "Let her go, Bill," he said. "We're off time, four minutes at least, and we were never that before. Let me drive her for a spell, Bill, an' you rest."

I think he was afraid my hand would be unsteady during that plunge downhill, for I was white as death, he told me afterwards, and looked utterly fagged out.

My heart was dead within me. "Jenny! Jenny! Jenny is dead!" sang the wheels as they turned.

"No, I'll keep her," I said. "I've got to mind them all, Jack."

We tore down, steam off, racing, if anything, too fast, for the curve before the bridge was a nasty one. But we had to make up our time, and your passenger is only pleased when he feels his carriage sway to the breathless speed.

"What a flood there'll be to-night!" said Jack. "It's been too quick a thaw; the snow's down in masses."

The drizzle and the fog swept past us in a luminous cloud.

"They do say they didn't build that bridge too well," he added. "Not tough enough for the weight of the spring floods, sir. They come booming down the Slaveboy in waves like the Bay of Biscay, so they do."

We came for the curve—the engine, like a greyhound in leash, doing her forty now when she thirsted

for her sixty, but I had to hold her for the sharp turn.

"Jack!" I screamed. He was stoking.

Ahead again—the huge figure—its arms up and down and up and down again, waving wildly for me to stop. Faster and faster, as if it could not insist enough. Madly now.

"Jack!" I cried. "Here!" He sprang to my side of the cab.

"Lord! I see her, Bill," he cried. "She's waving us down. What is it, man? What is it? It's waving us down!"

I did not know, but I meant to stop this time. Off went the steam, down went the Westinghouse brake; the engine whistled twice to the brakesman to put on all brakes. I reversed the gear and we slid round the curve to the right, slackening steadily, round again to the left—the worst bit on the line—then we stopped altogether, with the river howling and surging not sixty yards in front.

"What was it, Bill?" Jack muttered. "It warn't nothin' human, it was too big, but it waved us down—right enough."

The engine stopped with a slight jerk. I could hear raised voices, then feet pattering on the line. They were coming with sharp, angry questions, and there was nothing ahead to account for my mad action; nothing anywhere but the white swirl of the fog and the luminous glow of our head-lights.

"What's up there with you, Bill Summers? You almost stopped before. Is anything wrong with

the engine, or what's ahead of us ? ” The inspector dashed up, covered with moisture, and stood on the line in a blazing temper.

“ What's up ? ” he roared.

“ Nothing with the engine. Someone waved us down, sir,” I said quietly.

He would only call me drunk if I told him the exact truth.

“ Someone—what ! ” He swung into the cab, snarling. “ Waved you down out here, with no one within fifty miles—impossible ! You're mad, Summers,” he sniffed, aggressively.

“ I seen it, too, sir,” said greaser Jack. “ Waved us down hard, just back here.”

“ There's no one on the line. No one to do it.” Inspector Jones treated us to a flow of brisk abuse as he ordered us to start ahead.

“ Ten minutes late,” he roared, “ with the South-bound waiting for us and these Englishmen on the train ! I'll report this. Who could wave us down out here ? ”

I dared not say what I had really seen. It would have meant instant dismissal for drunkenness, but I repeated doggedly that we had been waved down and there must be something ahead. Until I saw what, I declined to start the engine on her road.

“ This will be a nice report to hand in,” he growled. And then, more softly, to a man outside—“ I expect his head's gone—wife dy—— ill, y'know. Jack, here, can run her,” he said. “ Give her over to him.”

"I'd like to squint ahead, sir," said Jack, doubtfully. "We were waved down, right enough."

"Someone out here?—it's sheer, downright nonsense. But come and see for yourself." Protesting and furious, the inspector dropped out, and we hurried down the line.

Mist-shrouded desolation on either side ; no house within miles. The chill folly of my story made me shiver. Who, indeed, could have stood out there to stop us ? No one would ever believe me. The sullen, roaring boom of the river surged higher and higher as we neared the bridge.

Our lamps held out, we scanned the empty line, looking this way and that. The mist had clung about us clammily, but a sudden cool breath parted it ; it lifted, rolling up in huge, white billows, a faint coppery gleam came from the ragged edges of the clouds, and in the faint light we could see the black mass of water as it slid and foamed in mighty majesty, and the long parapets of the bridge stretching out across the flood.

"There, you see," the inspector wheeled upon me—the others were some way behind, and in dumb despair I knew that I should lose my place, and my girl, ill as she was, know want. "You see, you, Bill Summers, you must take some easier job. You dreamt the whole thing, you two."

He stepped upon the bridge. The wood was tumbling strangely as the solid mass of waters struck it. "You——"

He stopped. His fingers gripped my arm, a fresh

eddy of fog dimmed our sight, but in the uncertain light the parapets seemed to melt into blackness where they should have run grey across the river.

"You—oh, look there—or am I mad?" he yelled. "Look there, Bill Summers!"

There was no talk of dreaming now.

"God in Heaven above us, the bridge has gone! It's gone!" He screamed and leapt from the rocking timbers to the solid line. Then crept out again, lamp in hand, until the feeble rays fell on emptiness. Not twenty yards from where we stood the Slaveboy Bridge had been completely swept away.

The flood was fretting, with yellow, foaming, dripping jaws at jagged ends of broken timber, tearing fresh mouthfuls with each onrush. Huge baulks swayed and went down, even as we looked. Here and there a few jagged ends dangled pitifully, a piece of broken trestle swung in the middle, one length of rail ran on to an unbroken baulk, then as the river mouthed and leapt, it fell, and there was nothing but the ever-widening gap; the turgid, unchecked flood.

The inspector's fingers were tight upon my arm. I bore the marks for days. We stood silent on the remnant of the groaning bridge, looking first at the flood, then at each other. Voices shouted to us from the line, but we took no heed.

"Who—waved us down?" whispered Inspector Jones, hoarsely. "Who could have done it—out here? For if they had not——" He pointed to the maddened torrent.

If they had not, the engine would have leaped at top speed into that awful void, dragging her helpless human freight to a swift but hideous death, trapped like rats in that mighty flood ; no time to stop her or to jump out, when that yawning chasm opened suddenly in front.

" Who waved us down ? " he repeated. " Who ? "

I could only shake my head.

He ran back then. " The bridge has gone," he roared out, running up the line and waving his lamp frantically. " The bridge has been swept away. But for the driver's stop we should have been all drowned like rats. Oh, it's too awful ! " He was wildly excited.

Passengers poured from the carriages, listening and shuddering ; they scurried along to look for themselves, they came back and wrung my hands and promised me a subscription. I stood dully quiet—I had not stopped the train.

" Search the line back there. Look underneath. We may have killed the man who saved us ! "

Lamps flashed under the carriages, were waved about to either side, but there was no one there.

" Sharp there ! Back her to Dennistown and get the news to Edmonton," cried the inspector, as he finished his search ; " the freight will be due here in an hour."

" Who did it, Jack ? " I whispered, as they were all searching. " What was it ? "

" What was it ? " I gasped out, watching Summers.

Africa seemed to have faded away, and I could see the desolate line, hear the hoarse roar of the flooded river.

"Ah, who?"—his eyes were very sad. "I got into the cab. I had forgotten my sleeplessness by now. Jack was out upon the line, looking about him, aimlessly. I peered out into the front, wondering if I should still see the figure, and then I saw what it had been.

"That moth was inside the big head-light, and its fluttering, tortured wings had thrown at intervals, as it moved, a gigantic, distorted shadow on the luminous fog outside. Those were the arms which had waved us down so persistently, and saved the train!

"Something prevented me from telling the crowd outside. I opened the light, took it out, and put it carefully away—the mystery was explained.

"But my heart was heavy as I backed the engine up the hill and down to Dennistown, where we 'phoned to save the freight, then back to Koolnay with our tale of disaster and escape. The station was filled all night, wires flashing here and there, but I left them and ran home—and"—Summers's voice grew very quiet—"my Jenny was gone—peacefully—in her sleep. There was no trace of pain in her tired face, and she smiled as she had often done to welcome me home.

"Driver Summers got his subscription and testimonial for prompt action. I could have taken my pick of trains then. But I never drove the old

engine, or any other, again. My heart was too sore with the duty which had taken me away that night.

“ I became a wanderer on the face of the earth, with only that scorched thing to keep me company. The moth was in the lamp, Grey, but—she promised to watch the run——” His voice trailed away ; he got up, walking to the window. I said nothing.

Then, after an interval of quite five minutes, he turned to me with a quiet smile :—

“ You don’t wonder at my keeping that moth now, do you ? ” he said, gently.

IV

MRS. O'DEA'S LODGER

“ I WAS nivir yit,” said Mrs. O’Dea importantly, “ mistook as to a man’s characcter. Nor was I iver took in as some other I could mintion.” Her glance was plain. “ Not tin minnits pasht I was makin’ in from feedin’ the pigs, an’ I see James here with a face on him like week-ould milk turnin’ away a dacent little felly with a pack on his back. Directin’ him down to yerself he was, Mrs. Clancy, saying he’d lie chaper there.”

The laugh which fat Mrs. Clancy gave was one of absolute good humour. She kept the second lodging-house in the little town of Abbeyduff, and had held amicable feud for many years with Mary O’Dea, who was well known as a hard woman.

“ He’d the face of a rogue on him,” said James O’Dea, with conviction. He sat by the fire smoking impassively.

“ So ye sint him on to me—success to ye,” observed Mrs. Clancy easily. “ Well, the dour’s shut an’ locked, and he’ll be back to ye. Faix, times, there’s some do be without the price of a brekfast, an’ they gits it; but, afther all, am I

poorer at the ind of the year for a bit of bread an' a sup of tay? I know ye'r cleverness, Mary; but, sure, I lives."

Mrs. O'Dea sniffed heavily, clattering cups and saucers.

Outside, rain fell in the village of Abbeyduff—a thin, exhausted mist, clinging with chill, emaciated fingers to the skirts of a cold night.

The sky was dim and dreary, an unbroken mass of grey, moving sullenly. Here and there pools glittered where lights from open doors fell on them; dejected donkeys brayed heavenward—further prophecy of bad weather.

In O'Dea's public-house it was warm and bright; the family sat in a low-roofed kitchen, where a big turf fire glowed, the light falling on polished glass and china; the dim roof was hung with bacon and strings of onions. In the bar beyond, Katie O'Dea, acclimatised to an atmosphere suffering from overcrowding, which reeked with porter and bad whiskey and worse tobaccos, served drinks to various dripping men with much indifferent repartee thrown in. Katie was a local beauty, who could afford to be rude if she chose. Her coarse, black hair was puffed out in a ludicrous following of fashion, and her red hands emerged from lace-bedecked sleeves. Old friends drifted through the bar into the warmer kitchen, gathering round the fire.

"James is that positive." Mrs. O'Dea hung the kettle on the sooty hook, and remarked that "'twas on bilin'," "He has the face of a rogue," says

James, says he, bawlin' it into me ear, and packs the crayture off; an' 'twould be the cute one, I'd tell ye, would get the bettther of Mary O'Dea."

"They couldn't shmell the taypot here without showin' the money," said James stolidly, "but I sint this wan off."

"Nivir did I make a mistake yit in judgin' man or baste," snapped his wife, bustling to a glass-fronted cupboard to take out butter and sugar, "save, maybe, whin I took James, here."

The audience laughed softly.

James O'Dea shifted his pipe from the left side of his mouth to right, and spat with emphasis.

"There was the matther of thim turkeys," he said slowly.

"Oh, Heaven, kape ye'r memory green," shot out his wife sharply.

James put his pipe back to its more familiar side.

"A fancy the wife had to huxster fowl," he went on placidly, "an' to buy a cartload for Tullown market; so away wid her to make a fortin', the price of a nate little pig in her pocket, she having wheedled it from me. Well, she wint far, and comes back in the dark, pleasant an' happy, with her full of thim; an', faix, I heard nothin' for the evenin' but how she was to git fifteen shillin' a couple—no less—next day in the market, havin' paid but tin. But, sure, whin I git up in the mornin' to help her—I recalls that 'twas freezing, an' I near to fall—didn't I see 'twas ould hins she had; ould crabs, five year an' more, that they sould to her in the dusk; an' glad

I was to see thirty-five shillin' back for the crowd. Indade, the pig, the crature, little knew the loss he went to."

The audience now laughed mercilessly, while Mary O'Dea, very red in the face, clattered at the cupboard.

"An' I a shlip of a girl," she said indignantly. "'Twas the youngness did it."

James remarked thoughtfully that "she'd minded that." "An' there was the matther of Malone's ass," he began, "an' Susie Dayly that lifted the sixpence"; but here he caught his wife's eye and desisted.

"I towld ye he'd be back," said Mrs. Clancy suddenly.

Someone looked in. A smooth-faced young fellow of between twenty and twenty-five, with sodden, shabby clothes, and sockless feet thrust into patched boots. A pack hung to his back, and his trade was further demonstrated by an inch tape and pair of scissors hung round his neck.

"The door was shut against me," he said, in a mincing Dublin accent. "So I returned. Maybe ye can arrange for me, after all."

Mrs. O'Dea swung her great form to the front of things.

"That's right," she said. "I was out, an' me man here takes no one without me. 'Tis 1s. 6d. here for a night's lodgin' an' ye'r sup of tay. Money paid to me now. No credit."

The young tailor's face fell; he hesitated and

looked out at the bitter night. Lines of fatigue and hunger were drawn on his thin face. With numbed fingers he began to search his pockets. A shilling, a threepenny bit, a greasy penny, and finally two stamps, were produced by degrees and eyed wistfully. "The last," he said. Mary O'Dea bit the shilling and swept the money away.

"That'll do," she said briefly. "Them that pays can rest. Let ye take a sate be the fire now an' dhry yerself. 'Twill be extry, of coorse, for ye'r brekfast in the mornin', or for an egg or bit of bacon."

The tailor sighed and turned to the fire.

"'Tis the last pinny he has in the world," said kindly Mrs. Clancy to a friend. "Look at the face of him. Isn't it the hard woman she is?"

The young man, having intimated that his name was Patsy Dayly, stretched thin fingers to the blaze, and in his mincing voice informed them that trade was bad entirely. He was broke where he was down at Clahir an' was trampin' to Dublin to get a sure job, Dublin being his birthplace. He then signified his willingness to make a suit for any man who would buy the stuff from his pack, for five shillings, and opening his bundle displayed a couple of lengths of such vile material that even the men of Abbeyduff detected its worthlessness and shook their unbrushed heads. His one sale was a card of buttons to fat Mrs. Clancy, for which she paid twopence. Dayly shut up his pack and stared hungrily at the tea-table.

The kettle had ceased to sing and was spluttering

and spitting from its narrow black mouth; the brown pot stood heating in the ashes, flanked by half-a-dozen potatoes left over from dinner. A loaf, a slab of butter, and a basin of sugar stood on the clean white cloth. The callers gave a kindly "Good evening" as they slouched out. Mrs. Clancy, much pressed and having always intended to remain, shook out her shawl and wiped her hands on her skirt ere she sat down. She and Mary O'Dea were enemies who could never live apart.

"A dacent, quiet boy," whispered Mary to her, as she filled the teapot, "though maybe short of money, an' James here turnin' him out. I dare say, now, if he was to go to ye, ye'd having given him tay for nothing, seein' the thin face of him."

"Seein' him puttin' out his last pinny, maybe I would," observed Honor Clancy drily, sitting down to the meal.

Patsy Dayly, tired as he was, tried to win his landlady's heart by helping her to lift the potatoes, telling them in a voice thin with exhaustion that he'd thramped sivinteen mile that day with but a bit of bread inside him.

"If it wasn't that 'twould break the tally I have for market to-morry, I'd give ye an egg," observed Mary O'Dea, with vague kindness.

James O'Dea put his pipe in his pocket; Mrs. Clancy smiled.

With stern hands Mrs. O'Dea measured her lodger's portion of the loaf and allotted him a tiny

slab of yellow margarine and one potato. These she handed to him with a glance which forbade further demand. But his tea was hot and strong, and he drank it greedily.

"Talkin' of eggs"—Honor Clancy raised a smiling face from her cup—"there's three in the blue bowl that Katie brought in late, and can't be counted for the market, so you can spare them. 'Twas well I happened to see thim same. James here 'd take one, too."

With a weak smile and bitter brow, Mary O'Dea rose to find the eggs and put them into a saucepan with a sacrificial air. James winked gently, and Honor Clancy unmoved, praised the strong tea and good butter, till her hostess's brow unbent. Dayly the lodger, however, caught her kindly eye and smiled suddenly: he was eating wolfishly. But though he left his plate bare and chased the crumbs round it with a damp finger, he was offered no more. Mrs. O'Dea knew how to keep her lodgers down. If he had chosen to pay an extra threepence, she would have given him unlimited bread and two slices of white American bacon. It fell to Mrs. Clancy to push away absently an untouched soda cake and remark *sotto voce* that he might as well ate it.

It rained on outside—a bitter, dreary evening. When tea was over, more loungers strolled in to gossip and drink. The tailor went out to them, spending his buttons price on a pint of porter and flirting with his Dublin accent with pretty Katie. Even distant London was not unknown to him. The local beauty

was so clearly impressed that Tom Carmody, who wished to marry her, felt black murder well up in his heart.

In the warm kitchen Mary O'Dea, very red in the face after her hearty meal, took occasion to reiterate how she "tuk the man in to lodge, nivir havin' been mistaken yit about man or baste," and "takin' good care she wasn't." Here she locked tea, bread, and butter away in the cupboard, lest some hungry lodger might steal down in the night.

"Not that I'm afeard of this honest little felly," she added, as she drained the tea off the leaves and put them in a saucepan to dry to supply the lodger's morning tea.

Dayly came in presently, a roll of newspapers in his hand. He asked for a candle to read them by, for he had, he said, some advertisements to answer, and was told it was a pinny extra for light, no sane man wanting to see his way to bed.

He'd pay in the morning, he said, when he had his breakfast, and after a moment's hesitation, got his light and left, his last glance at his landlady lacking cordiality.

Peace fell on the house of O'Dea, but Mrs. Clancy, kept awake by a sick child, was surprised to see a point of light gleam all night from one of the narrow windows set in the thatched roof. It was the lodger's part of the house.

The household were early astir. It was yet the cold grey of a winter's dawning when James went

forth to feed pigs and cows, and Katie, muffled in a shawl, went out to milk. Mrs. O'Dea raked the warm turf ashes together, blowing them till they glowed and the fresh fuel caught. She opened the back door to let in some air, for the smell from the bar clung heavily.

Patsy Dayly, looking white and wretched, came down pack in hand and bid them "Good-day."

"Will ye have a slice of bacon with yer breakfast?" demanded his landlady sharply. "We all takes it."

But Patsy the tailor bent a shamed head.

"To tell ye thruth, missis," he said, "I want to kape the few pence that's on me for the road." (None knowing better than he that those pence were nowhere.) "I'd not ask a bit in charity——" Here Mary O'Dea set her mouth grimly, and there was a flicker of humour in the tailor's face as he eyed her. "But"—he unstrapped his pack—"I bought some stuff very chape lasht week and made it up into things, and if ye'd buy them, ma'am, I could give ye a bargain, have me breakfast, and go. Bits of under-things," he added, laying some garments on the table and turning modestly aside.

Mary O'Dea pounced upon them. A hungry man drove easy bargains. There were two shifts of good strong calico, fashioned with more roominess than taste, but decorated with some hand-made crochet edging, an under petticoat of home-made flannel, and a man's waistcoat of the same material fastened with gaudy buttons.

Katie, coming in with her foaming tankard, ran to look, and conjured up a fleeting blush.

"Hand done, ma," she whispered, as she fingered the crochet on the shifts. "The same pattrern they taught us at the convent."

Mrs. O'Dea handled and disparaged; the tailor over his shoulder recommended his goods. Mrs. O'Dea held the petticoat up to her ample form, measured the shifts upon the resisting Katie, and made an offer. The materials were all solid and durable. The offer, of course, was a low one, but she presently advanced it a little, proffering eggs and bacon free for breakfast if it was accepted. Dayly hesitated no longer; he took the small sum of money, while Mrs. O'Dea put the things aside, and boiled eggs and fried bacon with an unusually liberal hand—she knew she had driven a hard bargain. The tailor ate greedily, gulping down hot tea and slices of flabby, high-tasting bacon. The eggs and bread he put in his pocket, keeping them all the time absorbed by his flow of conversation. He rose, looking better.

"Heaven save ye, ma'am, for a generous lady," he said, as Katie helped him on with his pack. "I have far to go, and I didn't sleep much. I hope the things will plaze ye. But fer yer goodness, I'd nivir have let ye have them." Then he vanished.

Mrs. Clancy, measure in hand, came across for her morning's milk she bought from the O'Deas.

"What ails the little tailor," she asked, "that he's makin' the road as if the divil was forkin' at his

heels? He past me house at the throt, and threw Deely, that was playin' at the dour, a card of coloured buttons."

"The divil at all ails him," sniffed Mary O'Dea, as she measured the new milk. "I towld ye was dacent an' not so poor." Here she lifted up her purchase proudly. "See here," she said, showing them and telling the price.

Honor Clancy fingered them curiously.

"Quare ways for a boy to be stitchin' thim soort of things," she said dubiously. "'Tis hardly dacent like. And did he give thim to ye for that price?"

"Hunger druv him. If he was with you, I suppose he'd have got what he'd ask an' a free brukfast. He nivir even bought the shtuffs for the couple of shillin's, an' he said but for me kindness he would not have shown thim."

Katie, yawning audibly, took out her leaden hair curlers, and remarked that "whin she'd the lodger's room done, she'd get a dhrop of hot wather to wash her face."

James O'Dea appeared at the door. He looked at the remains of breakfast.

"Did he get the bit an' make off?" he said, grinning. "Faix, I seen him peltin' down th' road like a sphurred horse."

Mrs. O'Dea, having expressed an "urgint wish that Heaven might sind him and Honor Clancy sinse," asked angrily if he had "iver seen Mary O'Dea give bite or sup without seeing the money for it," and again showed her purchases.

James took up the waistcoat and put it round him.

"Ye'd think he measured me," he remarked. "I'm glad to git it. 'Tis the shtuff ye spin yourself, Mary, for the blankets. Well, ye did right to get thim."

Mrs. Clancy took up her milk, but dropped it again as a skirling wail of despair rang through the house.

"Katie has a wakeness got," she gasped, unheeding the white liquid pouring across her feet. She dashed for the narrow staircase, flying fast to the summoning yells of "Ma! ma!"

"Mighty strong she's bawlin' if 'tis a wakeness she has," said James, as the women shoved him aside.

What a scene met their eyes as they ran into the little bedroom, with its sloping roof and dry, musty smell! The small windows were not made to open. Katie, scarlet-cheeked, leant against the table, tears ran down her unwashed cheek. She beat the air with helpless hands and wailed unceasingly.

"Oh, ma!" she cried; "the crochet mats I did meself at the convent ripped to tatthers an' gone, an' not a taste of the candle, an' the room littered with shcraps an'—— Oh! his shifts—no less."

"What ails ye?" cried her mother, as she came in, unable to grasp what it all meant. The floor was covered with shreds and scraps; the candle was a memory in its porter bottle.

Then Mrs. O'Dea ran to the heaped-up bed, and knew. Below the patchwork counterpane were the remnants of her strong twill sheets, her homespun blankets. They were cut and sliced remorselessly, but a scrap or two remained. Patsy Dayly had used

his wits and his landlady's goods to procure his breakfast and get back his money. Mary O'Dea had paid in kind and cash for her own goods hastily fashioned by the light of her own candle into the garments downstairs.

"Me little mats that took me two months to do!" wept Katie.

"Me blankets—me sheets that I saved the egg money for for two months!" shrieked Mary O'Dea, awakening to the flood of misfortune which poured over her. "That little felly with his assurance.

"I declare to Hivin," she wailed, "if I was to wear that underskirt, 'twould give me a chill to me legs, knowing how I come by it."

Then her husband's grinning face, the loss of her bedding, and the knowledge of her folly being laid bare before Honor Clancy, were too much for Mrs. O'Dea; she sat down and wept bitterly, gathering up scraps of her sheets and blankets with tender hands.

"Bawled for the dear life," James O'Dea recounted that evening. His wife was not visible, and his audience laughed happily. "Divil a softy at all was that little tailor. Didn't I always mistrust him, an' he was off with two shillings an' a warm breakfast. What's more, with the price of the eggs that was in thim sheets.

"Turkeys an' tailors," he added, stroking his new waistcoat, which he wore proudly, "there was nivr a woman yet could judge either of thim."

Mrs. Clancy remembered the present of buttons flung to Deely, and wondered.

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V

THE BIG NIGHT AT MESS

A HUGE tropical moon sailed clear in a sapphire sky ; the cool of the evening had fallen upon the steaming world. Outside, the distant thunder of the surf came peacefully. It was guest night at the mess of the Frontier Force. Dinner was just over, black boys were going round with coffee, and a wealth of fruit lay heaped upon the table. I was dining with Graves, a quiet, sad-eyed man, who had seen too much of Africa and her strange places ever to look lightly on the world again. He went home and married the next year, but that, as Rudyard says, is another story.

There was one guest that evening—James, of the Gunners, a complete stranger to the place, and only there for a trip.

We got up to go out on to the verandah, dropping into two cane chairs gladly. The day had been a baking one. It was towards the end of the dry season, and we longed for the tornadoes to come and wash the stale, steamy air into something like freshness. One panted through these last days of rainless heat.

They brought our coffee out, and we sat silent. Our hosts were seeing to the bridge table. It was my first night up with these men of the Frontier Force, whose whitening bones mapped out fresh inches for their Motherland.

As we sat in the quiet, breathing in the faint whiff of salt freshness from the sea, I heard someone coming up outside, rather quickly, then apparently jumping over the rail into the verandah, as it seemed, for I heard the creak of the timbers and the light pad of landing feet close to me.

"Who on earth's that?" I exclaimed, jumping up and peering over, for the verandah was at least twenty feet from the ground. "Hallo, there!" I called to Graves, who appeared in a moment at the window. "Someone's put a ladder up and jumped in."

I saw him put up his hand and move swiftly back into the lighted room, saying something to the others, but not answering me. The wood creaked again, and steps passed by me; but though the light of the huge moon made the verandah silver clear, and what shadow there was fell from the edge I leant against, I could see no one.

The steps passed steadily, if hurriedly, as far as the open window.

"Did you—did you hear anything?" I turned slack-mouthed to Captain James, who was gripping the sides of his chair and sitting up staring.

"I heard a fellow drop in and pass, but I'm blessed if I could see anyone except you!" he burst

out. "Hallo, you chaps, is this blamed verandah full of spooks?"

"Only of one." Graves's quiet voice echoed through the still night. "I'm sorry, but poor old Robinson often comes on guest nights."

"Over the verandah, without anyone seeing him? I'd like a liqueur, please," said the Gunner almost irritably. "Do you often hear it?"

"I'm afraid so," said Graves gently. "We all hear it. It's too well-known a thing out here, James; people are used to it now."

"My Aunt Maria!" observed Captain James in the telling language of the English. "I say, I don't believe in spooks, of course, but I'll swear *someone* passed me, with the whole place as clear as day. Would you tell us about it, Graves, instead of playing bridge?" Graves dropped into another chair. He looked at the star-spangled sky and the great moon sailing on her sapphire sea.

"It's a weird land," he said, "where strange things happen. I'll tell you two, if you wish—tell you of the first time Robinson came back to us. It is so often now, we have grown used to his coming. But there are some other things mixed in."

"You all remember, I expect, the breaking out of the little war in 19—, the Malal Expedition, they called it at home. Tahati, a big chief up country, had grown too big for his place. Grim tales of horrors floated down to us—of human beings killed and eaten, of white men who were swallowed up and disappeared, dying under torture in nameless

horrors. A half-caste trader, up for ivory and palm-nuts in a tuppennysteamer, who escaped with half the fingers of one hand left behind, came howling down to us, and then we woke. It was time to whip the native to obedience. The thing was spreading. Other tribes, who had at least abandoned openly their more hideous practices, took to them again. Murder and rebellion stalked, spear in hand, through the bush. So heads of departments gathered together ; we were given orders to start in a very short time. The usual warnings were dealt out to us : ' Human life to be respected as much as possible. We were to trust at first to the fear of the native for an organised expedition,' etc. Some of the older men, who had served before against these savages, smiled grimly ; they knew how we must fight our way once the black men rose.

" There is always something exciting about active service, even when it means marching and crawling through this awful bush. We wanted to have a pound at that unspeakable creature Tahati. Great, fat, black brute ! I was on his escort down, and he, who had seen Heaven knows how many human beings go shrieking out their tortured lives, shook and whined as a frightened child, and shrank until his skin hung in bags over his body, and turned the black equivalent for pale at every stir.

" The night before we started, we all dined here, cheery as children, talking shop as soldiers will. One cannot help a vague hope of doing something even in a little war. Every fellow wants to get on, and peace gives us no chance.

“Two months we gave it, laughing as we drank our champagne—an unwonted extravagance.

“‘Two months,’ cried Taylour, ‘and we’ll all dine here again, covered with glory, with old Tahati’s head upon a charger! Now, that’s settled.’

“‘After the war, anyhow,’ said our Major, smiling, ‘let’s hope we’ll all meet and dine in the mess.’

“‘Alive or dead!’ cried young Robinson suddenly. He was one of those over-cheery, merry fellows who feel everything too much, and wear their lives out by the strain they put upon themselves. Just then he was tremendously excited at his luck in coming in for service. ‘Alive or dead!’ he cried, jumping up, his glass raised. ‘To our next merry meeting!’ he cried, drinking off a glass of champagne and smashing the glass as he crashed it down. ‘I’ll be here, anyhow!’

“We might have scolded him at other times; this night before our start was privileged.

“The train dragged us far upon our way. Then we took for a time to one of those yellow rivers, with that hideous taint of marigolds in every breath of air, with the mangrove swamps festering all round, and the big alligators lurking on the mud; then we struck into the bush, and it began in earnest. No one knows how news flies in this country; blacks had sped on before us, and the tribes were more than ready. It was hideously nervous work in that dense bush, with those cunning natives lurking all round. We moved ponderously, carrying our millimetre. They were silent-footed as panthers, about

us night and day. Sentry after sentry went down, and it began to tell upon the men's nerves. We used to hack out a clearing at nights, and build fires all round, but there was the ring of that dense bush, full of tortuous paths we knew nothing of, black with a blackness one can almost feel. On moonless nights it seemed to gather and crush us. And there was the sense that men lurked there, cruel and ready! A shadow would spring from the shadows, a man go down shrieking as a spear drove through them, and these were luckier than the stragglers they captured. Poor fellows, I've heard their death-shrieks ringing through the night.

"They grew bolder soon; they rushed us a couple of times. It was a fine sight to see them pour out, a wave of big, grim-faced blacks, their great spears ready; but our men fought like lions, and the machine-gun taught them a lesson they did not readily forget.

"It was a curious thing watching the blacks fighting hard against their brothers; they behaved splendidly.

"A treacherous native guide put us in a bad way then. He took us into the bush and slipped off, so that we had to take the compasses and literally cut our way with axes. Heavens, what work that was, hewing and slicing at the acacias, hacking at festoons of tough tie-tie, and with the rank smell of that untamed bush vegetation about us everywhere! I don't think I shall ever be so hot again as I was during those two days. That we found that guide again and shot him was some consolation.

" But you'll ask what all this has to do with poor Derek Robinson? It has, because that extraordinarily highly-strung, cheery nature of his carried us through many dark hours. He grew thin and wiry as a terrier in training, but he never seemed to flag or know fatigue. His ears caught the sound of snapping twigs when we could hear nothing; he held the men together in the silence of those anxious nights. I don't think he ever really slept. His quick 'Look out there!' saved many lives, and it was he who dragged our treacherous guide out when we were just upon the village, and shot him coolly. 'Whew! Hot work this,' he said, as he hewed through that bit of virgin bush. 'I'm tired of tinned food, Graves, I tell you; I'm looking forward to our big night after all this.'

" 'It's a great strain,' I said, 'but it's nearly over now. Taking the village will be the smallest part of it.'

" 'It's just because it's so nearly over that I let myself think of the reverse side of the medal,' he said, laughing, showing me a new part of his nature. 'I don't believe anyone was ever so frightened as I've been, watching for death out of that bush.'

" 'Frightened!' I said incredulously. 'You don't know fear!'

" 'I'm afraid of pain,' he said dreamily, 'so I have to be extra brave to hide it. Now you know what a fraud I am, old boy.' And he was at his work again, slashing away with the blacks, while we panted for a breath of air.

" The tornado burst next day. Of course, we

had allowed ourselves too little time. The wind went raving and shrieking through the forest in an indescribable medley of sound; great wisps and strands of warm rain soaked us to the skin. It made the bush absolutely steam, and goes of fever were unpleasantly frequent. In the rush of rain and wind it was impossible to watch, and we lost four poor fellows that night.

“ But we got back to the track and out into the open before Tahati’s stronghold. He had fortified it quite cunningly—stockades of earth and reeds, with black faces and glint of spear-heads showing ominously behind the defences. So we called a halt, made cocoa and served out rations, and camped, toil-worn, dragged, ragged men, before four times as many blacks. Deep in the heart of a hostile land, no hope of summoning relief or reinforcements if we were overpowered. It’s wonderful how well that feeling makes you fight.

“ It was dawn as we halted. Mists swirled across the great cotton trees; every blade of grass was laden with moisture. A fiery sun was just about to shoot into the sky and turn the world to steam. Far off there was the sullen mutter of thunder and the dull roar of a coming tornado.

“ I wonder what those blacks thought of us as we settled ourselves down and drank cocoa, and saw to the Maxim, and rubbed up our rifles. And then the interpreter yelled for the instant surrender of the village.

“ They simply howled at us from behind their

stockade. One or two nearly blew themselves up with rusty old muzzle-loaders bought from German traders, but they hit no one.

“ ‘Peace palaver!’ shouted our herald, and had to interpret politely the African equivalent to seeing us blowed first. ‘Chief say you all lib for die,’ he translated pleasantly. ‘He say he fit chop you himself—war palaver plenty. Plenty black fellow lib.’

“ ‘Tell him we’ll give him until noon, then we’ll blow his bally village off the face of the earth!’ snorted Hilyard, who was in command.

“We are a horribly patient race, we of England. There we squatted, smoking, and were defied and blown at with muzzle-loaders. Judging by yelps from inside, they must have hurt someone. And the great sun crawled up through the misty sky until it marked midday.

“Then we fired at them, and fired their defences, and in half an hour, though they fought like demons for a time, it was peace palaver in earnest, and we were streaming through that bloodstained compound to prevent the old king or chief getting away. It was Robinson, of course, who caught him and brought him along, and Hilyard, seated upon the doubtfully dignified seat of an overturned biscuit box, which gave out strange, tinny squeaks and tremors, received his submission. The place was a shambles; the old brute must have gloated in blood. There was a hideous square, the stench from which was appalling, all adorned with a fringe of human heads—their poor faces told how they had

died—there were one or two victims whom in mercy we pistoled quietly from behind, and there was a meal in preparation in that old brute's house which I am never likely to forget.

“Hilyard's got the sacrificial knife somewhere, and I've some other horrors in my room—the witch doctor's mask and a few weapons, and so on.

“We camped outside the grizzly place, wondering if the other tribes would be impressed and come on, and they did next day, the chiefs professing due penitence and kindly blaming old Tahati for it all.

“We had to stay for a little to arrange things, and kill a few native cows to get fresh meat and generally recruit before we marched off with our miserable captive. Hilyard called us all together the day after the submission.

“‘Don't you fellows get wandering alone, shooting,’ he said. ‘We've done what we wanted, but nothing would delight the brutes more than to capture a white man and drag him off to torture him.’

“So we kept together while we made them burn and bury and sweep their shambles to some semblance of decency. Footi, my boy, came to me with tales he had picked up which made my blood run cold. No torture was slow enough to please the old king. There were white men's clothes, too, among the rags we found near the sacrificing ground, marks of fires, impaling sticks. The man was a monster under his black skin.

“We started back, leaving a wholesome air of British rule behind us, and a young chief to head

his tribe, with great promises of trade if these blood-stained children remained good. Poor creatures, I think they were heartily glad to see the end of Tahati. A warrior might wake full of life and writhe on an impaling stake before night, simply to amuse the chief ; they were terrified of him.

“ Now, Robinson got a sudden go of fever. The smells in the wet were enough to upset anyone, and it pulled him down greatly ; you see, he had been doing far too much. We tried to get him to lie up, but he declared himself quite fit when we started in the evening cool for Freetown, a depleted but successful little force.

“ After, when he halted, Robinson got out of his hammock and walked about. Then his servant told me a faint cry rang through the bush up a by-path, and he stopped.

“ ‘ Something wrong up there,’ he said in his quick way.

“ ‘ Ju Ju path. Not good,’ said the boy, pointing to some black threads drawn across.

“ ‘ Ju Ju fiddlesticks ! ’ said Robinson, starting down the path. He was gone for about five minutes—we were all busy—there was a wild beast’s snarl, a roar for help, and by the time the blacks, who wouldn’t face the Ju Ju’s, had got some of us back, Robinson had utterly disappeared. The bush was impenetrable there. We searched and called and waited for half a day uselessly, until at last we hoped some leopard had really taken him ; but I mistrusted the black men.

"The chief from the neighbouring village was a most ill-looking brute, and they may have signalled Robinson out as the capturer of Tahati.

"I believe they dogged us until we reached the river, then we glided away on the now sullen, flooded waters, and reached Freetown without further adventure, but with sad hearts. We missed the boy we had lost, and the uncertainty of his fate preyed upon us. But to have gone back and searched the villages would have been perfectly useless; they were outwardly friendly, and yet would have told us nothing.

"We were all together for a little time at Freetown before they scattered us again. The big dinner was to come off, and, of course, we asked several guests. Young Robinson's fate faded a little from my mind as I saw to everything being ready.

"The dinner was on a Friday. I was alone in my rooms in the morning, when my servant came in to say a native was in for palaver.

"He was a big, rather savage-looking fellow.

"'Captain Graves, sah?' he asked.

"'Yes.'

"He tugged a scrap of paper from a small native pouch.

"'White man gib me this for you,' he said.

"'From—Robinson!' I caught the paper from his hand. 'He's alive, then? We can rescue him?'

"'No, he dead, sah—died 'fore I start. He

write bad, for one hand cut away,' said the boy quietly.

"I opened the tiny scrap of paper. It was a label off a biscuit tin, and the rusty red letters sickened me—they were written in blood. 'I'm done for, old chap,' it ran. 'They caught me that time down the path, and I'm dying slow. The end is for to-night. This boy Muti has been decent to me. Give him money. No dinner for me; the stake's—ready.—R.' The end trailed off weakly.

"'They caught him?' I muttered.

"'Yes, sah. They take him because he catch chief, and they kill him—slow. I mind him; I sorry, for he always laugh; but alone he cry.'

"Sitting frozen with horror, I heard how the poor boy had been jumped on as he ran down the path, and carried away, not to the village itself—they were afraid of that—but to some scattered huts near the river. Muti was his guard. In that wonderful way he possessed, it was evident that Robinson had in some way won what passed as his heart. Muti was tired of life up there—he was not at all sure that the chief did not want to kill him—and this desire and cupidity may have helped his liking. But when Robinson had persuaded him of the great gain which would follow his escape, it was too late; the white man was faint from torture. He could only promise him reward if he brought me this letter, written in blood.

"With a sickened heart I heard how our poor fellow-soldier had been treated. And his death?

I knew their way of killing—in the end. I flung out the question in a frenzy.

“ ‘ He no die so, sah. I bring him poison berry from bush. He chop him and die plenty quick; then I slip away afterwards—bring you this. He too weak to run, and poison berry better than——’ ”

“ I stopped him. That was all. Young Robinson was gone, and he who had feared pain had suffered it in all its hideousness.

“ I gave the black boy money and promised him any help I could give. He talked of enlisting. Then, with a heavy, wretched mind, I went to give orders about the dinner. I would not tell the others until afterwards. The boy was gone now; it was no use darkening everyone’s pleasure until this entertainment was over.

“ But I could not banish him from my mind. Over and over again I seemed to see his laughing eyes and nervous, sensitive mouth, and the horrors of that ending far up in the bush made me cold in midday heat.

“ I remember the day was still and steamy, the tornadoes gathering breath for fresh efforts.

“ Greenwood of the Gunners, an old school-fellow of mine, had landed from England that day, and was dining with us, asked by me. He came to call on me in the afternoon, but I was out. I found his cards when we came in. ‘ No one in the mess to see him,’ the boy told me.

“ ‘ I’m so sorry you found us all out, old boy,’ I said as I greeted him. ‘ Hope you looked after yourself ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, you weren’t all out,’ he said carelessly. ‘ One of your youngsters was in, sitting at the writing table, but he wouldn’t speak to me. He looked very ill and worn, so I didn’t worry him, and went off again.’

“ ‘ I looked round. It wasn’t like any of the boys, and none of them were ill. Besides, the mess waiter had distinctly told me that no officer was in.

“ ‘ I wonder who it could have been ? ’ I pointed out Myers and Melicent and Dickson, but he shook his head at them.

“ ‘ All back after your shindy ? ’ he went on, passing it over. ‘ It wasn’t as big an affair as we all expected it to be.’

“ ‘ All except one,’ I said sadly—‘ poor young Robinson.’ Our last big dinner rose before me, and Robinson’s flushed face as he sang out, ‘ To our next merry meeting ! ’ and smashed his glass. ‘ He meant to be here to-night,’ I said. ‘ He was our life and soul up country. He was carried off.’

“ ‘ And you’re sure he’s dead ? ’

“ ‘ Sure now,’ I said briefly, adding that he was not to speak of it to the others. ‘ You see, he personally caught that fat chief, and they were hot against the boy.’

“ ‘ They hung old Tahati in Freetown next day, and I believe he was found, on the morning of his execution, lying helpless from fear of death—he who had gloated over its slow coming in his victims.

“ ‘ The room was filling fast ; Greenwood had come early. The night was exceptionally close and

hot, not even a breath of wind stirring, and Greenwood and I came out here, standing and talking of old days, though I fear I was the duller of company. I hated the whole show.

"Hilyard knew of Robinson's death ; we had told no one else. Just then I heard hurried steps coming across outside. They paused below the balcony here, and then I heard the pad of feet landing on the boards.

" 'Who on earth is that ? ' I said sharply, just as you said to-night, as the steps passed me going to the window. ' I see no one. '

"The night was pitchy dark, not light as this one is.

"Greenwood pointed to the window.

" 'Why, don't you see ? ' he said. ' It's the young chap I spoke of. He's going into the room, laughing. '

" ' I—saw no one, ' I said. Something was chilling me in that torrid African night.

" ' Oh, yes, he's gone in now—a slight fellow with curly hair, looking so ill. He was hurt, too—his left hand cut right off to the wrist. I saw him lay it against the window. You should see to him, old man. '

"See to him ! It was Robinson with his maimed hand ! I rushed up to the window. Hilyard was standing there. Could the boy be alive, after all ?

" ' It's Robinson, sir ! ' I burst out. ' Greenwood saw him run in. He must have slipped through to his room. '

“ ‘No one came in.’ Hilyard grew rather white. ‘I heard steps running, Graves, but no one passed in here.’

“ ‘There was no pale boy in the lighted room, only the merry, chattering crowd waiting for dinner to be announced.

“ ‘But Greenwood saw him pass in,’ I said piteously—‘he saw him!’

“ ‘Robinson—said he would be here,’ said Hilyard quietly.

“ ‘An’ they had cut off one hand, sah!’ I staggered back, clutching at the window, as I recalled the native’s words—recalling something else—that in Africa they say tortured spirits always return. Running to the mantel-shelf, I took down a photograph of Robinson and came hurrying back to Greenwood.

“ ‘Was that the boy you saw?’ I asked earnestly.

“ ‘Oh, yes,’ he said easily—‘same fellow I saw this afternoon. Won’t you see to him? He looks ill. Surely he won’t dine?’

“ ‘I wonder,’ said Hilyard in a low voice. His face was very pale.

“ ‘We went in then. There was an empty place, for a guest had failed to turn up. Over and over again I found my eyes fixed upon it, wondering if the boy who had sworn to be with us sat in the vacant chair and watched us dine—if the spirit which had passed in agony would never rest again.

“ ‘I told Greenwood after dinner, but he only lifted his eyebrows in polite disbelief. ‘The climate

plays the deuce with you all out here,' he said. 'Why, I saw the young fellow plainly.' But, later, when he understood that the boy was really dead, he grew more thoughtful.

"That was four years ago. No one has ever actually seen young Robinson from that night since he came back to be with us at our dinner, when we were all together.

"But often, as we sit here—sometimes with long intervals, generally, curiously enough, when we have a guest night—the steps pass up that verandah and on into the mess."

Graves drew a long breath and shivered. "I often wonder if he sits in there with us," he said. "We've had the ghost-hunting societies to look and wonder, but no one knows what it may be. They heard it, too; that is all they can say."

He got up. "Have I bored you, you two, with my strange story?" he said in his quiet voice. "Africa teaches us to understand many things."

Bored us? We got up, glad to get into the lighted room, and tried to forget in the combinations of the ever-varying game of bridge. But even there the thought was with us. What torture-haunted, wistful eyes might watch us as we sat—what unseen form move among the men he will not leave? Sceptics may mock, but let them sit out there in the strange hush of an African night, see the great silver moon ride in her sapphire sky, and hear for themselves those steps pass up the balcony, then they can mock if they will.

VI

THE WINNING OF MADEMOISELLE CLAIRE

THE country-side swayed and struggled in the wrestle of a by-election. Leaded headlines in the local Radical press depicted the horrors of famine which would follow the exodus of free trade. A brown-black loaf, made in Germany, was procured by an enthusiast, and then hastily hidden when it was discovered that this loaf, though brown, was a luxury of moneyed Teutons. The Tory press hammered out the descriptions of the horrors which would follow if Tariff were not adopted. The people listened to the trumpet-tongues of fervent orators, the chemists sold throat lozenges in large quantities, and the small warm heart of a great Empire throbbed furiously fast.

At Haleslyn Hall, in Hidshire, there were, in fact, only two subjects of conversation: the wooing of the great heiress, Claire Delvin, and who would get in for Haleslyn, the neighbouring town.

Ralph James, the Radical, thundered rough but splendid oratory, sweeping the working-men with him until they stood and cheered him to the echo,

feeling the glow of prosperity to come, and then going homewards to poor little households, where meat and even bread were scarce, and fell to wondering in sick despair where work would come from to earn weekly wage.

Captain Arthur Leigh, the Unionist, was more earnest than eloquent ; he put plain facts before the people, simply and straightforwardly ; he entreated them to see, rather than ordered them to follow him. He promised things which he meant to perform, but the great wave of enthusiasm was not with him, and no one knew which way the pendulum might swing at the last.

The big house-party could hunt but little, and often shoot less ; they gathered in the big warm rooms and talked politics, until the butler, in a fit of absence, offered stewed Tariff to his master, and Miss Hesterly wrote *Cutlets sauté à la Carson* on the evening's menu.

They talked of this and of Mademoiselle Claire, the brown-eyed, brown-haired heiress, with her faint French accent, most carefully intensified by its owner ; her gay wit and insatiable vanity.

Her mother had been Mademoiselle Delorme, daughter of a great French house, and Claire, the only child, had inherited millions and millions of good French francs and house property in sunny Paris. She had been left many English pounds, safely invested in Canada by an English uncle. The tale of Claire Delvin's riches was enough to attract eligible sons from any other part of the world.

Claire's aunt was weary of going round the world. She wanted to see the girl settled, and Lady Hesterly had promised that if really attractive and desirable husbands could induce the flighty damsel to make her choice, it would be made at Haleslyn Hall. There was Lord Alexis Stantinden, who might, if death were kind, be a Duke; there was Sir Claude Granger, supposed to be the best shot in Europe; there was Algy Hesterly himself, son of the house; Colonel Levingly, a great author,—and amongst them all, in the midst of rank, fame, good looks, little Claire Delvin sat and smiled and waited.

They called her Mademoiselle Claire; it was her fancy. She was pleased to be intensely French, to prate of her descent from famous, if somewhat frail, beauties of the Court. She affected Paris gowns and hats, and the completely charming French accent alluded to previously.

And last, but very least, was Captain Leigh, the Unionist candidate, who was merely earnest and ordinary; never likely to make Westminster ring with great speeches, or to do anything but solid and conscientious work for the party to which he was pledged.

He shot fairly; he rode straight in a quiet way; he danced nicely; and he was foolish enough to have completely lost his heart to the brown-eyed, spoilt little piece of vanity, who tripped over the polished oaken floors in five-guinea shoes from the Rue de la Paix.

Now, the weak spot in Claire's armour was

vanity; she was, in other ways, shrewd and level-headed; she was apparently extremely heart-whole, but her heart was with the days when courtiers ruffled it in silks and laces, and men fought duels and won through desperate adventure to gain their lady's favour

"You are so *triste*, so solid," said Mademoiselle Claire airily, as she refused the possible Duke for the third time. "You expect to ask and gain, and you for it do nothing—you English."

Lord Alexis murmured something about the hanged healthiness of his relatives, and swore there was no thing on earth he would not do for Claire—except—he drew the line at murder.

"Ah! *tiens! tiens!*" she laughed saucily. "When I see I believe, Lord Alexis," and left him moodily desperate, until he rang for a brandy-and-soda, lighted a cigar, and took up the day's paper. Then he said it was a pig of a day, and wondered if the girl knew what she wanted.

No compliment was too sweet or large for Mademoiselle Claire to swallow. Colonel Levingly called her Nina de l'Enclos, and said he would put her in a book; and for twenty-four hours she posed to him saucily and vainly, nothing but her naughtiest, gayest little speeches.

"I do so long to see myself in print," she said. "And there will be a picture of me in the beginning—a miniature, as of Ambrosine, and yet you will write it of the days of Louis XIV., and everyone will know it is me—Claire."

The author, whose travel-books were famous, but who wrote better of bison and bears than fair ladies, and couldn't read two words of French, wondered ruefully whether he had promised too much.

"And I will dedicate it——" he began.

"To me, of course," said Claire. "See, I have a miniature, a beauty."

"Dedicate it to my wife," said the author softly.

"Ah! *tiens!* but how dull! Then I give my picture—nevere!" snapped Claire peevishly, and was off before he could explain.

His day was over and the book forgotten, for Sir Claude was going to call his new colt-foal, to be entered for the Derby, and of course to win it, Monsieur Claire, irrespective of its breeding.

"Claire wins!—Claire wins!" the gay little thing's breath came quickly. She thought of the huge packed stands at Epsom, the hoarse voices thundering her name—Portrait of Mademoiselle Claire Delvin, and the Derby winner called after her.

Sir Claude felt the glow of victory upon him. He chattered and talked of the colt by Flying Fox until Leigh, writing out speeches, heard him, and heard Claire's ripple of delight.

"What! for me—to see—hey!"

She poised upon the arm of a chair, her tiny feet swinging rapidly out from an audacious flash of orange-hued flounces. And Arthur Leigh, looking at the sweet little dark face, felt the sick hunger of hopelessness in his heart.

He had no chance after all.

"It's a long way to the Derby," he said dully, drawing a hideous horse upon his speech-paper. "Three years, Miss Delvin."

"Three years—non! But he enter him; it is in May next!" she cried pettishly.

"The colt was born two days ago," said Leigh, smiling. "We are slow people in England, Mademoiselle."

"Three years—*tiens!* An *éternité*." Claire began to forget that Sir Claude was handsome. "Oh, but you are slow, with your silly elections and your rainfalls and your mud! And all for nothing. Come, play battledore with me; it will be better."

She was adorable in her slim daintiness, her pretty hair unflattened by hair-nets, her dark eyes shining.

"I must finish this," said Leigh doggedly. "I must—I speak to-night."

"Go—in the rain—it falls now. Oh, but horrible. Keep to your speech then. I am not worth bothering about. Go." She tossed her head, and flushed and bit her scarlet lips.

"You know that's wrong," he said humbly. "You know—I'd give up anything—do anything. But this is England, you see"

Two men, unseen, came into the shadows by the doorway.

"And you would put England—bah! a leetle village in it—first. I teenk not—if I——" She laughed softly to herself. "See, I will help you with it as you come not with me."

A coquette, bright-eyed, and pink-cheeked, perching suddenly, lightly as a bird on the edge of the big table—a jostling up of pens, and paper, and notes, a fat ink-bottle overturned.

What manner of speech Leigh wrote, with the fresh scent of *verveine* in his nostrils and the little dark head bent over his hand, he scarcely knew. His fingers were icy, his heart thumped, but he wrote on doggedly and scarcely looked up.

“Non, not that; it is *triste*, dull. They will be cold: promise them warmth.”

Claire criticised, revised, dashed in words, until the man’s head reeled; but with astonishment he saw that the criticisms were good, that the advice rounded his bald, plain periods.

“It is your speech,” he said at last, looking ruefully at the inky, smudged ruin of his notes.

“And it is finished. Leave England. Come and play.”

“I must copy it out—now. I cannot—go with you.”

“Ah! bah!” Claire tossed her head. “So you would do anything but what I ask. You would not give up England for five minutes”

“I would, and you know it,” he shot out almost angrily. “Now, I’ve only an hour. I must make this straight.”

“Ah! *tiens!*” She drew away, strolled off singing the Marseillaise, and declared she would play bridge.

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Reckless and thoughtless, Claire made many mistakes; but she expected a constant stream of praise, and seldom missed it.

"I lead that—I teenk myself of leading that," she would say triumphantly, while a tried but adoring partner wished that thoughts for women had never been invented.

"No one plays like Mademoiselle Claire. It was genius, that," was what he said aloud.

No one sang like her, danced like her. Other girls looked in with sulky enviousness as the great heiress held her court.

Then the motors plashed through the slushy, blinding rain, and it was time to leave light and comfort and go out to wrestle with the slowly moving brains of those in the town.

And in the hall, smothered in feathers, was Claire Delvin.

"I go to hear the speech, for I make him," she said. "You come, Lord Alexis. You, Sir Claude. You, Mr. Heslingtree."

Sir Claude had carefully arranged a sore throat, but he had to come, and Claire sat in the open and heard her speech, and said "*Bien!*" whenever she thought she recognised a word.

So for a day or two she was quieter. She read the papers, she helped Leigh with suggestions, some shrewd and some impossible.

A severe rain kept all indoors, and then more came down. One could neither shoot nor hunt, and the day of the election came nearer and nearer

with a tenseness of sharp suspense—for great landed interests were at stake in the country.

A common woe makes men friends. Sir Claude and young Heslingtree sat in the smoking-room and talked, not of the election, as they ought to have done, but of Mademoiselle Claire.

“If one could fight a duel, kill a man, or set an empire at war for her, she would say Yes,” said Sir Claude ruefully. “You heard what she said to Leigh on Friday. Now she’s always with him. For vanity—pure vanity. To see if he will leave his work if she bids him, and also to put her words in his speeches.”

“If Leigh were out of it, I believe”—Desmond Heslingtree knew another girl, a pink-cheeked, golden-haired Saxon, who interested him far more than the heiress, but he had wooed obediently—“I believe she’d take you, Claudie. The shootin’ and the ridin’ and so on, y’know.”

“Supposing we made a bet with her,” said Claude, looking at the fire—“made her back her influence and saw it lose. I have an idea, Des. All’s fair, y’know, and it would make me——”

And Mademoiselle Claire, sweet-eyed, dark-haired, came into the room, a face brimful of sauciness and naughty self-will. She sat by the fire as the conversation turned on the days of old.

“When men died for their fair ladies,” sighed vain Claire. “Ah! now they live—for themselves.”

“But wouldn’t a man in love do anything you asked him?” Claude suggested.

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"He would—if I asked." Claire's scarlet lips parted over a row of pearly teeth ; she flung up her dusky head. "But one does not *ask*, Sir Claude."

"There's one wouldn't," observed Heslingtree stolidly—one."

Ah ! *tiens !* name him," cried Claire wrathfully. "Who ?"

"Arthur Leigh. He would go to his constituents though the priest waited for you both at the altar."

"He would—not." Claire laughed merrily. "*If*—I should try. Bah ! if I should ask—he would not."

She was absolutely sure in her vanity. Furious at being doubted.

"I believe—you could not—even you—could not sway Leigh," went on Heslingtree, in his stolid way.

So two men, who ought to have known better, led the foolish girl on to make a bet. And she made it, oblivious of great things at stake—for she was sure of winning.

"We shall see," she said angrily, flitting off to talk to Leigh.

Now, Captain Leigh was to address a meeting at eight on Tuesday night, and the fight was on Wednesday. With the uncertainty in the hearts of the men in the town, his absence from this meeting would be absolutely fatal to the cause.

And on Tuesday Mademoiselle Claire must go to the town to shop, and Leigh must come too. He knew little of motors himself. Claire drove,

and left her chauffeur behind. She dawdled in the town, and it was dusk before the Panhard came out on to the roads, through a pale evening, with clouds stealing up the sky.

As they came home, with still ample time for Leigh to get to Haleslyn and drive back in a motor, Claire swung from the high-road on to a narrow by-lane. The wheels ran softly on the road.

"It is shorter this way," she said.

She was very sweet to-day—coquettish, appealing, with a new look in her brown eyes; and the ache of a love which he believed to be hopeless was sore in Leigh's heart.

She came to where the lane dipped to a stretch of moorland, with a patch of trees to the right and a desolate stretch of water rippling on the left. It was difficult to tell the track, and they crawled along. The cry of a coming storm whined through the trees, sending loads of rain down with soft thuds.

Claire talked softly, and romance ran by the little car. Leigh, hoping for the first time, blurted out his love.

"For Claire, ah! little Claire, I care so much," he was saying, when the car jerked, dragged, and stopped.

"There is something wrong. Oh, this rain!"

Claire jumped out, lifting the bonnet. Leigh heard the clink of metals and a sharp cry.

"The connecting-rod's gone—smashed! We can do nothing," she cried, as Leigh held a lamp over. "You must run to the Hall—send help. But no, I dare not stay alone."

She shivered, and it was certainly unspeakably lonely.

"But I—I have barely time to get back to the meeting," he said, his face growing pale.

"Ah! your meeting. Ah! see there, I can send."

A figure showed at a gate—Claire beckoned to him, and before there was time to think, or indeed it would seem to have sent a message, it had vanished into the trees.

"I have sent. He run—go fast. We are seven miles from the Hall. I mistake the route. But now they come to us, and we stay here. You and I. You shall tell me—more."

Her voice was soft and winning; she opened the door of the tonneau. Leigh looked at his watch. If he walked back, very fast, he could reach the town in time. If he stayed here, he must be late; even when a car came, it could not travel fast on the muddy roads. And there was Claire, yielding, soft-eyed, her lovely little face framed in a quaint motor-bonnet.

"I—I cannot stay," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, but—you will stay, Arthur—I want you here!"

She stretched out a little soft hand and laughed gently. Claire was still sure of her bet.

"I——" he set his teeth. "Claire, you must understand—I cannot," he rasped out.

"You would leave me here alone, with the water and the desolate wood and the coming storm!" she said shrilly; "leave me here to perish of cold,

to be robbed by *Apaches*. You talk, but you care not what become of me."

"Oh, you know I do—you know it!" He stood, watch in hand, staring miserably at her. "You know that I love you, Claire."

"Then stay to protect me—and I will be all to you, for I care too," she whispered. "I dare not stay alone, Arthur. See, we shall be so cosy in the car."

"No; you must walk to the town—fast—with me," he stammered.

"Walk!" Claire held up an absurdly shod little foot until the light of the lamp in his hand fell on it. How far could she go in buckled shoes and silken stockings, with froth of lace and silk about them? "Choose," said Mademoiselle Claire softly, and stepped into the car. "Your love for me or your stupid election. For if you go—I will nevere forgive you."

Arthur Leigh's hands were damp and cold as he fought his battle. All he wanted on earth stood smiling at him from the car—and it was lonely there—he had excuse. Claire, sweet-faced, foolish little Claire, would never forgive him.

"If you dare to leave me, I nevere speak to you again!" She grew angry now. "You leave me—for ever—and I—I have said I care—I, Claire, swear it will be Adieu."

Lovable, but over-vain, she would never speak to him again. He knew it, but he did not waver.

"Claire—you know—if it were anything else."

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The weariness of intense strain was in his voice. It is cruel to see happiness and lose it. "But in this case I do not belong to myself. Even my expenses are being paid. If I stay, I betray a trust and all those poor working people, and it is my country's trust. So if it must be good-bye, little Claire, good-bye." He bent over her bare fingers, kissing them. "I will send a car," he said, and not trusting himself to look back, swung away through the falling rain.

Tears sprang into Claire's eyes; she stamped upon the hot air-tin. Her vanity was hurt and probed until she could have screamed aloud.

"So much for love," she cried—"for his love; but——" The tears brimmed over and fell on the fur rugs.

Then out of the shadows came two men, and alone as she was, Claire did not seem afraid.

"So—you lost," said Heslingtree.

"*Mais*—I lost," said Mademoiselle Claire haughtily and angrily.

There was a motor waiting round the corner. She walked to it, the buckles of her absurd shoes twinkling in the moonlight. She laughed at Sir Claude's sallies, she smiled at him as they snuggled into the recesses of the Renault limousine, but as they neared the Hall she grew a little nervous.

"Of course, it's honour, not to tell," she said, rather humbly for Mademoiselle Claire.

"*Cela va*," quoted Sir Claude lightly. "It shall be—our—secret, Claire—that man's folly."

And Claire did not rebuke him.

She was gayest of the gay during dinner. A string of historical pearls was clasped on her soft neck, the Rinsky pink diamond sparkled in her dusky hair; her dress of soft white chiffon was caught here and there with gems. She was adorable, a being hall-marked by good fortune; and Arthur Leigh, as he came in, hoarse and weary from his meeting, looked at her wistfully, recognising all he had lost.

"After all, I ought never to have thought of it," he said to himself. "And yet—she spoke as if—she cared."

"Go off well, Leigh?" The lazy ones asked eager questions.

"I think I shall just scrape in," he said simply, and went away to the deserted library.

Mademoiselle Claire, with hot cheeks and sparkling eyes, never gave him a glance. She was playing piquet with Sir Claude.

"*Tiens!* I lose all to-day," she said pettishly, and bade them good-night.

Next day came in in a glaze of clear soft sunlight, with the world held in gladness.

Everything was swept away by the all-engrossing subject of the elections. To be or not to be? Tory and Radical—the party was a mixed one as regards politics—thundered at each other across kidneys and bacon, and grew fervid over toast and marmalade.

Leigh was ready for the fray, quietly bright and

alert, though with lines of pain about his well-cut mouth.

Motors thrummed and panted at the door, and it was time to go.

Sir Claude and his friend spoke blithely together.

"He's out of the running now, and she's tired of her aunt," said Sir Claude. "That was a great scheme, old boy, with the vainest little woman in the world to work it on."

Leigh came down the steps. As he did so Claire's motor drew up at the door, and Claire, radiant in exaggerated reds, walked demurely behind the candidate.

"But you are driving with me, Miss Delvin—Mademoiselle!" burst out Sir Claude, running after her.

"But no," said Mademoiselle Claire. "I am driving with Captain Leigh, as—his fiancée—if he'll have me."

"As WHAT?"

Leigh wheeled, staring at her.

"But yes. They bet me you would leave me last night. It was a put-up thing—mean, unworthy, just to foster to my vanity." Claire spoke rapidly, not sparing herself. "And I bet you would not leave me—and you did—and then——"

"And then——" said the three men simultaneously.

"Well, then—from that minute I knew it could never be anyone else. Women like strong men,"

said Claire softly. "And so—if I may drive you——"

Leigh held open the door. He had a strange sense of unreality. The sunshine was gold—the clear air elixir.

"It just settled everything. Now, you two, run and find voters," said Claire saucily, as she slipped in her clutch.

But half-way down the avenue she suddenly slowed down.

"Oh!" she said, and almost stopped—"oh, you may think it too bad of me! I—know I am vain. Perhaps my vanity misled me this time?"

She looked up nervously at Leigh.

"It did not," said Arthur Leigh earnestly. "Not this time, little Claire—who has given me a wonder-world."

The Panhard leaped to a suddenly opened throttle, and some people say the pretty glowing face beside him helped Leigh to the small majority which got him in.

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VII

A BARGAIN AT KNOCK FAIR

“ **I** TELL ye ’twould be a hard man that’d come over me in the matter of a horse,” said Garry Neagle loudly.

A chorus of “surelys” and “why nots” and “ye’ve said its,” slid out from behind a varied collection of lighted pipes and thick tumblers.

The usual evening group was gathered in Fennessy’s public house at Croagh village. The reek of raw whisky, heavy porter, and vile tobacco, wrestled with a dozen more established odours, jostling into a lively scrum of evil smells.

The “public” was also the village general shop where a man could buy tea and matches and bacon and then stay on to drink. Garry was an important man there ; he was an orator holding forth nightly. A portly, red-faced man, with scrubby whiskers meeting under a double chin, and a fleshy nose dipping towards a loose-lipped mouth. His shoulders were broad ; a dirty waistcoat stretched uneasily across his portly stomach.

Garry’s farm nestled snugly on a rich pastured slope ; he was well to do, and no one was allowed to remain in ignorance of this fact.

“ Will ye be lookin’ to buy to-morry, Garry ? ” asked Fennessy as he served out porter.

“ I will so.” Garry’s grey eyes dwelt on a pretty dark-haired girl behind the counter. “ I’m sellin’ the ould pony. I want a bit of fashion now, to draw the cyar to Mass.”

Mary Fennessy, the dark-haired girl, blushed a little ; she had come upon a month’s visit to her uncle’s, and began to feel certain that she might never again leave the little village on the slope. But her blue eyes strayed past Garry to a quiet thin man leaning against the door-post, where whiffs of pure air intruded shyly.

“ A bit of fashion,” boasted Garry, his eyes upon the girl. “ New blue cushions on the cyar, and a tasty one in the shafts : that’s the way to dhrive ye’re wife when ye gets one. I tell ye I can buy an’ sell, not like Andy Casy here an’ his ass. Did ye iver hear ov that ? ”

They had heard it many times, and were willing to hear it again ; but Andy Casy fidgeted, looking at Mary. She had not heard the story. But he said nothing. He was a mild-faced quiet man, with humorous light blue eyes, and was ten years younger than Garry.

His house, a thatched cottage, was just across the road, where he farmed a few acres and made it pay too, for he had other scraps of land farther off, and hoped in time to have more.

Since Mary’s arrival Croagh village had watched the rivalry of Andy and Garry, wondering which

would win. Her uncle of course leaned towards the richer man, Mary herself giving no sign of preference.

Andy took his pipe out now; he knew remonstrance was useless.

“ ’Tis the great man ye are, Garry,” he said, good humouredly.

“ Ye see ”—Garry came nearer to Mary, who was sorting some packets of pins—“ ’twas this way. Andy wanted an ass, an’ his mother loosed him off to Knock Fair to buy one. He wasn’t there long when he was tuk with a nate little brown ass, as lively as a bee. He’d ask no one’s advice, but he parted thirty shillin’ for it, and off he stharts tellin’ all what a grand little animal ’twas. But, faix, after a few mile whin the whisky an’ ginger died out ov it, the ass wasn’t able to walk, but sthud on him. An’ thin as he was batin’ her on, Tim Ross passed by.

“ ‘ In trouble, are ye?’ says Tim, says he.

“ ‘ Begorra, I am so,’ says Andy, says he, ‘ for the grand new little ass I’m after buyin’ has a sickness tuk.’ ”

“ ‘ Begob,’ says Tim, ‘ I should know that one.’ An’ he stopped. ‘ God save ye, Andy,’ says he, ‘ I sould one old ass to a tinker for five shillin’—here she is. Look at her knees.’

“ So down he lights and picks a handful of grass, and sure enough there was two ould marks filled up with a ball of grease as cliver as you plaize. Twenty years of age, no less, an’ sore Andy was, he goin’ home to his mother. Signs bye she fell in the cyar

on Sunday and bruk the shafts an' near killed ould Kittie Casy."

A chorus of chuckles ran around the room. Tom Delaney said their ass was dying an' maybe Andy'd buy her.

Mary Fennessy did not laugh. She frowned, but she avoided looking at Andy, who smoked on, smiling.

"They'd be a long time doin' that same to yerself, Garry," he said, good humouredly. "We'll all watch ye buyin' at the fair to-morry."

"An' ye'll see what I'll buy," boasted Garry. "I can afford a nate one. What colour do ye like in a horse," he asked Mary suddenly.

"Grey," she said, blushing.

"An' a fine colour too," said Garry amorously. They wouldn't do him in a hurry, he went on. He not to run his hands down a baste's knee. Eyah, nor to look at the teeth. Wasn't his mother's first cousin Magee the horse-dealer, an' that sort of knowledge ran in families.

He boasted on, and Mary listened. His big house, the new horse, the outside car, were all things which must be weighed.

Then someone asked Andy if he was buying or selling at the fair.

"Gettin' rid of the ould grey mare," said Andy, coming to the counter. "She can't draw a load now, and she's always wind suckin.' She's no use at all, an' I have a young mare comin' on."

Garry laughed contemptuously. "Dogs' mate,"

he rolled out, " the miserable ould stageen. Better not be wastin' ye're time, Andy, me boy." Then he leant over Mary. " Will ye look out for the new horse to-morry ? " he said.

" I will," said Mary doubtfully.

" An' take a drive with him ? " whispered Garry.

" Maybe," returned the girl, more doubtfully.

Andy, his eyes twinkling, watched Garry go. " Wouldn't it be fun, now, if they sould him a quare one," he said to Mary. " An' will ye dhrive with him ? " he added wistfully.

" He's a fine, clever man," said Mary doubtfully, still vexed by the story of the ass.

" An' will ye walk down to the old Forth as ye said ye would after tay ? " asked Andy.

" Not to-night," she answered sharply, and he turned away.

" The fine, warm man Garry is," declared her uncle that evening. " Ye should let him spake, Mary."

Mary, standing at the door, looked across at a low thatched cottage, dark against an amber sky, and answered nothing.

Knock Fair falls in early May. The hedges were green ; light clouds raced across a sky of tender blue. A motley crowd rode, drove, and led their goods down the steep, stony hill which dips into the town. Ragged, unkempt horses ; rough colts, wincing at the halter, their heels ever ready ; old mares reft from their offspring, filling the air with bitter protest ; talkative youngsters answering

back ; old women misguiding donkey carts ; droves of cattle ; calves ; sheep plodding onwards to a patient death. Garry bestrode a borrowed cob, so that his great weight should not tire his own black. Andy's long legs were clamped about the grey mare, a dejected-looking old beast, with a blanket of hair upon her.

Garry forgot him, he flung himself into the thick of the crowd, arguing, cajoling, until his little plain horse was sold for eleven pounds with three shillings back for luck. Garry, well satisfied, went rolling off for a drink, and came out again to hunt for the "bit of fashion" he meant to buy. He stopped a bay, and detected broken knees ; he saw a black, but the owner asked twenty-five pounds, and went away in heated anger when Garry offered ten.

But Garry smiled. It was a two-day fair, and to-morrow would be his chance. To-morrow when men had to sell. He rolled on, hailing, criticising, and then stopped to stare at a pair of lean-faced men looking like dealers, yet widely removed from the Mullens, Hartigans, and Gleesons who made the fair their own.

"Not a horse ever worth looking at," grumbled one as Garry came up. "Lord ! see that:" he pointed towards Andy's mare trailing miserably down the dusty street. "If the fool had ever smartened her, but I suppose he wouldn't know her then, I bet you." A sudden laugh bubbled between his lips, and he bent whispering to the other as they walked on.

"Englishmin," said Garry. "Faix, I'll have a laff at poor Andy when I tells this to Mary. . . ." Here he dived into a shop and bought a gaudy brooch for a shilling, remarking that anyone would put it down at a pound.

Morning saw Garry still horseless. He lay for the night in a dirty lodging house, and was up early, for twelve would see the end of the horse fair.

The morning was clear and bright. Garry felt a very big man as he strolled to the bridge to see if any fresh horses came in. He had delayed his mating, but now he was really taken with pretty Mary Fennessy, who had, moreover, a comfortable fortune. Andy's rivalry ceased to trouble him. Mary must see what a poor fellow he was. So Garry mused amid clouds of dust, and then his eyes were caught by a light grey mare coming jauntily up a side street; she was hogged, docked, and clipped, bending her head to a curb bit as she sidled past.

Garry looked and longed. Here was the bit of fashion he wanted. "He was the man to spot horses. . . ." He could hear the chorus at the public house; could see Mary's delight. "Hi," he cried, and the grey was turned, coming lightly, shying at a cow which passed her.

"Throt her down," commanded Garry, and the man jogged off and came back.

A nice mare. Garry saw the owner was one of the strange dealers. "We bought her in Cork and brought her here on chance; but she was delayed

in the train until late last night. I see you know a nice horse," he said.

Garry swelled with importance.

"We wants thim good," he said, looking at the grey's legs—there was a blemish on the off hind, a hairless scar. He wrenched her jaws open.

"Oh, she's eight," said the man carelessly. "But as, of course, you can see, no more."

Garry could not see, but he said nothing. He asked the price, trembling.

"Five and twenty," said the stranger briskly.

Garry's spirits rose. Why, this mare would grace Dublin. Sir John would give him fifty when he came to Croagh House. Garry commenced to haggle. But he met his match in the smartly dressed stranger. Torn between longing for the grey and natural parsimony, Garry wavered and argued, always fearful lest the stranger should grow impatient and go into one of the more crowded streets where she could at once be sold.

Then a view of Andy standing close by, an anxious smile on his thin face, decided him.

No young woman could resist the prospect of driving behind this treasure. He would tell Michael Fennessy the matter must be decided at once.

The bargain was concluded, the eleven pounds received for the cob, and another twelve, taken from a greasy book, were handed over to the dealer, who seemed to find something very amusing somewhere, and in return Garry received five shillings, a glass

of whisky, and the right to put the cob's bridle on the mare.

She looked lighter when the saddle came off, but no prouder man than Garry ever struggled to the yard of the little hotel, to get out his borrowed pony and go home. Tired cattle and horses and half-drunken men congested the road. Garry met no particular friends to boast to, as he clattered over the road with the new mare stepping lightly beside him.

Andy, driving his waddling Iceland, was the first Croagh man he saw, and Andy smiled at him merrily as Garry roared out boastful words and trotted past. The apathy of fatigue and strong drink wrapped up other neighbours until Garry grew peevish at their lack of notice.

The miles were many ; at Teelea cross roads the mare swung on to the road for Croagh at a shamble very different to her prancing exit from Knock. The shamble in its turn died to a walk, she hung behind the cob until Garry's wrists ached. "May the devil himself buy a broom to sweep ye home with," he said piously. "Ye're not prancin' with the gentry in Cork now," and he hit the grey hard.

She took it apathetically, as one who knew stick. Her stumpy tail was down just as Andy and his Iceland picked them up.

"The grand new mare is tired out on ye," said Andy pleasantly, as he passed. "But I'll tell thim she's comin' on."

Garry cursed in response.

But all things come to an end—the road wound

upwards between high banks, and twisted into Croagh village. A maze of carts and horses and cows seethed about Fennessy's public house, barring the roadway. Garry got off with a grunt of joy. The moment of his triumph had arrived. Andy would be there: Denny Mac was strolling in; he would see Mary's face behind the counter. He tied mare and cob to the back of a cart and turned to admire his purchase. Dejected and jaded as she was, she still pleased him, her dappled skin, her hogged mane, and short tail, and thin clipped legs.

Garry rolled importantly through the door, into the heated, thick atmosphere, where tired men clamoured for drinks with which to oust the partial sobriety which the twelve miles from Knock had urged upon them.

Garry bellowed happily for porter, his great shoulders sweeping a clear place near pretty Mary. He could boast now; tell of the grey outside. Then he saw Andy standing close by.

"Did ye sell the ould mare, or dhrag her home," he asked offensively.

"I sould her well," said Andy, in a raised voice. "For eight pounds, no less, and glad I was to see it for her."

A ripple of comment ran close upon this announcement.

Garry winked openly at his cronies. "Indeed, and did ye now. 'Twas a fine price. I got thirteen for the cob, an' chape I let him go. But I have a

fine one back. A grey what ye'd fancy, Miss Fennessy, with a coat like silk on her and trimmed to the nines. It's waste to have her here whin she ought to have a victory at her tail in Dublin."

For those who do not know it must be explained that a "victory" did not mean a triumphant procession, but the carriage which represented to Garry the greatest luxury on earth.

"An' did ye pay much now?" said Andy softly, as Mary bent forward, peering out.

"Faix, not for her vally," rolled out Garry. "He'll see her now. She belonged to someone away, but catchin' her on her interin' the fair, I snhapped her before any of the quality laid eyes on her. The owner saw I knew a horse too, an' he said so."

"Ah, ye're the boy, Garry. They'll not come over ye. Andy shud take ye with him whin he goes to buy an ass."

The chorus fell like music upon Garry's ears. Triumph wobbled his chins, and puffed out his loose-lipped mouth. He looked out to see his mare, but a fresh cart had drawn up, blocking out that which he had tied her to.

"An' what did ye give for her, Garry?" asked Andy again, his eyes twinkling softly, despite the laugh against him.

Garry called for more porter, then drew closer to Mary.

"Twenty-five pound—and not to miss it," he thundered out.

"Be . . . gor!" said Andy. "Are ye sure?"

"Sure," Garry swung upon him. "If I takes a fancy to a baste, Andy Casy, I could part a hunder and not miss it, an' for this one—they were fools that sould her so chape!"

"Is that so?" said Andy thoughtfully.

"Come out, will ye boys? and ye, Miss Fennessy, till I show ye the natest little baste iver came to Croagh."

Mary came out into the room and Garry rolled to the door, diving out into the maze of tied beasts and carts. A hasty glauce showed him that the mare had vanished. The borrowed pony was there, busily stealing hay from the cart he was tied to, but it was alone.

Garry stared aghast. Had the mare broken loose and gone back to Knock. He dashed through the medley, looking from side to side. Then with a muttered curse he unhooked the pony's bridle.

"She's away," cried Garry. "Galopped off through the country. Me own fault to leave a blood one tied loose like an ass."

The crowd hummed advice and sympathy. Tim Maloney, who was rather drunk, searched in the pigsty, and Denny Mac, who was very drunk, hunted in a cart full of calves, averring "she might be . . . mixed . . . up like . . . ye'd never know."

As Andy used bitter words to both a big old woman came to the gate of the opposite house and called him loudly.

"Andy. I want Andy. Sind him over. Here's

the ould mare home to us with the hair whipped from her, and the mane and tail gone from her, she waggin' the stump pitiful and lonesome. Andy, come over."

Garry turned with a sigh of relief.

"That's not ye're mare, Mrs. Casy," he said to Andy's mother, "but a gran' new thing I'm afther buyin' at Knock. The colour misled ye. Sure the wimmin"—he turned to wink at the crowd—"niver know one horse from another. I'll come across to her."

But Mrs. Casy left her gate and marched half way across the road. Everyone in the public house had come out by now into the soft May evening.

"Me not know the ould mare?" said Mrs. Casy to Garry. "Eyah! Maybe!—though the heart's broke in the crayture for the loss of her fine tail. Didn't she lift the latch and snake into the stable as she always used to? Isn't the skhelp on her foremost leg there for all to see. Go in an' listen he drawin' wind if ye doubts me."

For a moment a horrid qualm touched Garry. Andy's old mare was a wind sucker. Then he laughed.

"Is it likely now, woman, dear, that I'd bring that one home?" he thundered contemptuously.

"Isn't it like indade they'd do ye, Garry?" came in comforting chorus from the crowd.

"'Tis nonsense the ould woman's bawlin'," said Garry to Mary. "Hould on a minnit now till I show ye the mare."

But Mrs. Casy, hearing, turned, and ran back, her face aflame. She swung through the gates, scattering chickens and puppies from her path, shrill yelps and clacking hailing behind her.

"The wimmin," said Garry, grinning. "Oh—h—h!" The long note of contempt rang loudly. "Come across and see the baste," he whispered to Mary.

Then Mrs. Casy reappeared at her gateway, dragging the grey mare behind her.

"That's her," said Garry. "I'll take her home to feed her." He held out his hand for the bridle, but Mrs. Casy held it.

"Andy," she cried. "Will one of ye throw out Andy to me? Andy, I see ye hidin'. Were ye mad to take the fine blanket of hair from poor Noreen?"

"Arrah! Give her to me," snarled Garry, "an' have done with ye're nonsense. Just becuz she's grey."

Andy leant against the door-post and smoked calmly. He did not answer his mother.

"Nonsense, maybe," said old Mrs. Casy. "Tellin' me father's daughter, he that owned five horses and an ass, God rest his soul, that I don't know Noreen." She came closer, dragging the mare behind her. "Look at her leg," she cried. Tim Maloney, happily drunk, lurched at the mare's leg, and felt it.

"The same skhelp, surely," he said. "I seen it done."

A flicker of amusement and delight came over the listeners.

"An' the crooked walk of her," said James Maher; "she'd wind thim legs as if they was a ball of wool."

Garry began to foam at the mouth. "Andy," he roared, "Andy, for the love of God come out to these dreamers and idjits."

A wave of shoves laid Andy before Garry and the mare.

"Well, Andy," queried his mother, "what have ye done to Noreen?"

"Sould her," said Andy placidly.

"See, ye set of Goumthawns," said Garry.

"Sould her," repeated Andy, puffing out smoke, "to a tasty pair of strangers. They guv me eight pound an' thin one axed me——"

"What?" roared Garry, his fat jaw tense.

"Faix the name of the shop where he'd buy a clippers," said Andy softly.

The grins of the crowd widened, ending in a deep roar of laughter.

"Afther," said Andy, and they turned to listen, "I follyed him a bit and seen him comin' laffin' out of Dayly's wid a new clippers, and a packet from the drug counther. Sure I could swear to old Noreen anywheres," he added, touching the grey's shaven, shivering neck. "See the stump's raw on her."

Garry dived for the borrowed pony. The truth was upon him. It engulfed him in a muddy, bitter, taunting torrent.

He, Garret Neagle, had bought Casy's old mare, minus several pounds of hair, a mane, and tail, plus a pair of new shoes and a certain cunning mixture of whisky, ginger, and other things. The crowd resolved itself into a whirl of grinning faces. Guffaws like the roar of surf thundered on his ear. Once and again his trembling foot missed the stirrup.

"An . . . An . . ." He paused for a moment. "Ye, Andy—ye saw me buyin' her an' ye niver sphoke."

"If it was another man, a foolish felly like me-self," said Andy, "I'd surely have said a word. But yerself, Garry—ye'd have sint me off to buy an ass if I went to help ye. With ye're mother's first cousin too, a horse-dealer an' all."

There were many laughs to be accounted for. Andy was only human.

Garry landed in the saddle. His furious heels drummed on the cob's side. He caught at the grey's bridle. Reduced to absolute despair by the thought of further journeyings, the old mare hung back with a jerk and was only induced to proceed by various thumps and shoves, until at last Garry disappeared round a bend in the road.

The crowd laughed its laugh out heartily. They had suffered Garry's despotism for many years: it was over now.

But Andy, looking across the green fields into the amber twilight, stood by Mary's side.

"Will ye walk with me to the old Forth to-night—Mary?" he said softly.

The old Forth green with budding thorns, its banks starred with late primroses.

Mary resolutely thrust all thoughts of outside cars and clipped horses away from her . . . she blushed and looked down.

"I will so . . . Andy," she answered quietly.

VIII

ESCAPE

THE lamps now made the wet pavements dull, gleaming shadows, with pools of darkness, the clouds raced across a dim and sodden sky. Now and again a gust rising in capitious fury came, shaking the heavy-headed roses and drenched annuals in the little suburban gardens. Warm as the night was, the curtains at No. 5, Elm Row, known otherwise as the Beeches, were drawn, the windows shut. Two men sat in the study at the back of the house, the hour was late. One slight, slim-faced, clear-eyed, smoking quietly, a whisky-and-soda by his side; the other smaller, ordinary of feature, yet good-looking until you studied his weak mouth and heavy chin and furtive eyes. Clever with the cleverness which counts itself as nothing if it does not overreach others. Assertion as yet a coward.

“Martin, I have said all I mean to say.” The elder man spoke smoothly. “Does it enter your head that I am far too good for you, but for your father’s sake I let you go free? Here are one

hundred pounds in notes and a little gold. Take them ! ”

“ As final, Glynne ? ” asked Martin sharply.

“ As final. Use them, start with them as you choose. I have had enough of you.”

The man called Martin leant forward.

“ No one but you knows,” he said. “ I could replace this borrowed money in a month—this slump is only a flash, and you know it. Give me a chance until the special settlements of the shares I gambled in. It was only borrowing.”

“ Borrowing which you have done before. No, Dick Martin. It’s over. My firm has done with you. You had every chance. The books are here. You see what I must replace and pay. I have one thousand pounds to do it with. Here is my bureau. Now take your money. There is an early train. You have youth, brains—too many. One hundred pounds. I say I have dealt leniently with you.”

The younger man leant back, gnawing his fingers. A sinister light in his narrow eyes—youth, brains—one hundred pounds. He who kept a motor, lunched at the Savoy and the Carlton, ruffled it as a rich man in this great London, to be hounded out, flung on the world. And no one but James Glynne knew. He drew a hissing breath. If Glynne were gone, if he could have those books and save exposure——

“ I’ve told the servants you are leaving early,” said Glynne, “ and now good-bye.”

"You'll expose me?" gasped the other.

"I must, I have no choice," said Glynne coldly.
"You are not fit for decent company, Martin. Now go."

He stood up, looking on the mantelshelf for his tobacco. A heavy dagger, a trophy from Tapa, inlaid and beautiful, lay on the table. Martin's fingers fell on it—there was a swift movement, a dull sound; silently, coughing a little, Glynne crumpled up, slipped to the floor—coughed again and lay still, wide-eyed and very quiet.

Martin stood back staring at what had been his partner. He let the dagger be—there was a little blood oozing slowly. No sound in the quiet house.

How much was made of killing! It had been so easy, so very easy. He stooped to the still figure, rifling its pockets; taking the keys, he opened Glynne's desk. Yes, there were the notes, the books. He put the former into his pockets; he took up the books: they were not so easy, so he must pack them up. He disarranged the room a little, undid the window catch, took Glynne's watch and chain, and smiled as he did so. His brain was working so clearly that its power almost hurt him.

What fools men were who were caught—who neglected details with the still thing behind them. He wrote a note:

"Dear James,—I am off by early train to B., as per your arrangement. Shall be back Wed.

next. Dine with me at old place. Don't forget Stewart's instructions.

R. M."

He was careful not to blot the note. He put it in an envelope and all the time he listened. Then he gasped—there was a spot on his shirt-cuff; red and damning. Very quickly he slipped from the room. The clock struck one. He had seven hours' start. There was a train at four to Euston, a slow, crawling thing, which he would catch. He would go to the sea, lose himself there. Take a second hat and coat. Oh, it was all so easy! He would walk to the next suburban station, slip in there. Stealthily he slipped to his room and opened his wardrobe. He took a shirt and a suit of clothes, and changed; the white shirt with the stain was packed into his bag; he put on a cap, slouched and large, and a dark overcoat; he carried a parcel with another coat and a panama. Glynne wore glasses; he went for a pair.

But now the minutes flew. There was a make-up box in his room, a hair dye. With all the lights up he used it—turning his fair hair brown and dark, doing it deftly, quickly. He pinned the note on his pincushion, ruffled his bed, left his dress clothes, a second white shirt, in his room. He attended to every detail. What fools criminals were! He would come back on Wednesday or Thursday, expressing sorrow—surprise. Take up his partnership, drive his car again. It was all so easy. The

books ! He had almost forgotten them ; they made a bulge in his bag, but he stuffed them in. The house was full of noise. Was that Anne coming downstairs ? Would she go into the library and see what was there ? With teeth bared, and grinning as a nervous dog, he stood in sick despair. But it had been a gust of wind. He stole noiselessly from his room, slipped into the dark hall, and out. Down the garden path, not so easily now, the great dim world was so big and cool. Steps heavy, slow, on the pavement—a solid policeman coming his rounds. Martin crouched behind a clump of tiny bushes. What if the man should come in and see him ? He was bathed in sweat ; his heart choked him.

Constable XX. yawned as he came to the gate, clicked it to—it was open—and passed on. Tramp, tramp. Minutes were passing as he got slowly on.

Martin got up and came to the gate. He smiled now. Constable XX. had found it open, it might help as they gathered evidence.

He was out on the shadow-haunted pavement, treading lightly, going faster and faster. He would never get to the next station in time. Down Kilnia Road, past green squares, each moment a lurking terror. Another policeman. Martin slackened pace, turned before he reached the man, passing away in the shadows, and then flew on. Edward Street at last. He was thirty minutes too soon. A shower came lashing down ; he stood in it, not daring to go into the station. A rumble at last—a whistle.

There were two other travellers. Martin dropped some money with a cry.

"Get me my ticket—third—will you?" he said, giving a sovereign to a sleepy workman. "I've dropped half a crown."

It saved him showing his face at the office. Off now, rumbling Londonwards, grey dawn stealing across the sky. He pulled his cap down, fearing the light.

II

Euston came all too soon, with dawn breaking. He went out, bag in hand, into the quiet streets. The sea! Yes, the sea was best.

He had no pity for Glynne. Glynne had been hard to him, cruel, unjust. He might have understood a rash speculation; not turn a man out of light into outer darkness. The milk carts were about now. He passed through London unnoticed, a mere traveller carrying his bag. Criminals were such fools: they took cabs, gave themselves away. A man on foot was lost in the vast city. So he walked on until the sordid large houses and dim, dirty squares gave way to shopland. Which should it be? Charing Cross, Victoria, Paddington, Waterloo? He would go down to Folkestone. He chose Victoria.

The waiting-room was almost deserted. He went in, lying down on a sofa, for one man sprawled half asleep in a chair. He turned his face away. Better

up in a newspaper. They, too, must be lost. He replaced the crimson frills and washed his blackened hands. New clothes: he must get them—lose all these. He looked down at his shirt, and sprang up. “James Glynne” was written neatly on the front; the wash had got mixed up. Off in a minute; changed wildly for one of his own, which was not marked. And what to do with this? He lit a match, holding the shirt over it until the words were burnt away; he trembled and shook as he did so.

He had brought one suit of clothes; his name was on it. He ripped out the mark; burnt it too. Socks—they were marked. At last they were all free of his name or Glynne’s. The hot afternoon drowsed across the world, and he sat cold and shivering in his bedroom. It was not so easy to remember everything.

III

His coat hung behind the door, the dark one he had started with. No name in it, but—why should he have two coats? He stuffed it into his bag, and locked the bag and stood up, sweating now, glancing down at the quiet road. But every hour counted. When his beard grew no one could tell him. They would never look in a big watering-place. He had forgotten nothing, nothing.

The evening waned. A thundering knock at his door brought him, panting, from a doze. Who was there? Who——

“Yer tea, sir”—from Mrs. Simmons.

Sloppy tea on a japanned tray; melting, strong

butter ; a loaf of bread, a slice of stringy, pink ham on a thick plate. He drank the tea, but could not eat.

Mrs. Simmons was sympathetic.

It was his chest, he said lightly. He had, worse luck, to grow a beard. He would go out for a letter now. Then a sudden, fresh fear. The beard would sprout yellow, betray his brown hair.

He locked his bedroom door and went, with parcels of charred paper in his pockets, down the streets of little houses and into the town. He wanted more clothes. There was an outfitter's ; he went in—shirts, socks, bought prodigally.

The shopman looked at him critically. Martin stepped back, for these notes might be numbered. He must change them, get away, but change them first. He went out, parcel in his hands, breathing hard.

Down to the shore—the tide was lapping in. There were people everywhere ; he strode along, cursing the heavy parcel, until he came to comparative quiet. Then the little parcels fell on a gurgling, quiet sea ; they would soak, sink before morning. Shrill voices behind him roused him.

“ Gladys, Herbert, the man is floating paper boats ! ” A rush of barelegged children to watch the boats. One opened, the scraps of charred papers fell on the sunlit waters, dancing across them.

“ What foony boats ! ” said the prattling voice. “ Just burnt papers.”

Fear ! The fear he could not put away as he went back. These children would talk ; people

would wonder, and perhaps inquire. The slit covers were dropped in nooks and crannies on the beach before he went upwards to the Leas, crowded even in July. He was safe there. But never quiet. Into the town again. He bought some studs, and changed another note, some links in another shop. He had plenty of gold now. He snatched food in a cheap hotel, and read an evening paper.

The lines he had expected were black before him. "Awful murder in the suburbs. Mr. James Glynne stabbed. The police suspect robbery. Mr. Glynne's partner, Mr. Martin, away on business, address not known. Watch and chain missing. Bureau rifled and open."

Watch and chain! Martin turned sickly green. They were in his bag.

He left his dinner, sped back to his lodgings, and on the way sent himself a telegram. These were the little things that fools forgot.

It came ten minutes after he got in. Half of it was used to light a pipe, the other half left on the table for Mrs. Simmons to see :

"Sorry can't get away to-morrow.—Tim."

Sleep curiously, came to him. He had done everything. He was lost down here. But he stayed in bed next day, and felt the stubble grow on his chin—already his spruce good looks were gone. The papers revelled in the crime—some burglar—the window was left open. The police had a clue.

Martin laughed. If his beard would but grow he would slip to France and away. He was satisfied again.

He lay in his room again, complaining of headache, and then went out. Half-way to the beach he took his handkerchief from his pocket. Oh, was he mad—mad? His name was on the corner. After all he *had* forgotten something. He might have dropped it any minute. Had he done so? He stood clasping his hot head, trying to remember.

The watch had to be got rid of. He slipped away along the beach, on with the handkerchief clasped tightly in his hands, until he was alone, to watch it burn. But madness—madness—clever as he was he had forgotten this simple thing. There might be another handkerchief in his room. With fevered fingers he dug in the moist sand. A fool would throw the watch into the sea. He would bury it. It sank at last into a deep hole; with a little smoothing over it might lie there for ever. The blood-stained cuff went into another hole. But he hurried home, posting a post-card and letter to himself on the way.

Up to his bedroom, searching wildly. His other handkerchief was in his bag, the damning name upon it. He burnt it, too. Out again for a bottle of hair dye, going warily to-night; he was not altered yet. Back, to darken the stubble on his chin and lip, growing fast now. But in a day, two days, he would be safe.

IV

He ate a slab of cold atrocity sent up with lumps of yellow, soapy potatoes, and read the paper, taking

it up easily. A day or two now, and he could be away—Canada? A man could live well there, there were some shares he wanted to buy. He would send money for them, give his address out there. He ate and drank with appetite, and read . . .

“The murder at the Beeches. Mr. Lloyd, of the London and County Bank, came down to-day. It appeared Mr. Glynne had drawn a large sum in notes on the day of his death. The bank hope they can trace all the numbers. There is no news of Mr. Martin.” Suspicion is beginning to fasten itself upon him. He was not seen to leave the suburb. Notice of the notes will be given now. The porters at Grangedon saw a man with a bag—a man in a dark coat and cap pulled down. He stopped, and he changed two notes. Panic in the quiet little room; the paper flung down. He would change no more. He could not pay for his passage out. He gnawed at his fingers again, and sped out into the night.

A little later he was back, and called Mrs. Simmons. He showed her a portion of his wire:

“Come at once to Cheltenham. Alice, ill.” He must go there immediately—in the morning—by the first train.

And at night he could not sleep. Supposing that children should dig upon the beach, the watch be found? All night he saw the moist sand raised, caught the gleam of gold. He stared in the little glass in the early light. The stubble was thick on him and dark. His eyes were hidden by smoked glasses.

Bag in hand, he went to the busy station. Who was that man there, staring at him ? He hurried away to the train. Was that a detective there ? He changed at Redhill, and went across country—anywhere—to some big town. Night saw him at Manchester buying a new coat ; he left the blue one in the train. Travelling on again to Birmingham.

He came to obscure lodgings, lay in terror in an attic-room. It was so easy, so easy, yet fear dogged each dragging hour. The papers again—opened in trembling eagerness. Nothing more. He laughed his fears away. After all, it was very easy to escape. Some of his jauntiness came back. He went out into the smoky streets, and into a restaurant. The glass which threw back the reflection of a commercial-looking man, with brown stubble on his chin and brown hair, laughed at the possibility of recognition.

Dick Martin was lost. He could go abroad. The money would be changed there at some shop. He could buy jewels, and then pawn them. He had not thought of that.

He started up with a laugh. That could be done even in London, and he would be in France before they raised the hue and cry. He would buy a wig—red, for choice—and go up now, leaving his bag at a station—and—his hand had waved as if in joy at his sudden plan—a glitter caught his eye. The man who had forgotten nothing wore a peculiar old seal ring, known to all his friends. A barbaric thing, yellow topaz set in bloodstone and fringed

with diamonds. His hand dropped to his side. Had everyone in the restaurant seen his guilty start, the sudden hiding of his left hand? Who was that man over there with close-cropped bullet-head? A detective, perhaps. "A reward is offered for any information concerning Richard Martin. Five feet nine inches, slight, blond hair, clean-shaven, last seen in dark overcoat and tweed cap, wears a curious signet-ring on left hand."

In deadly fear he conjured the advertisement up. Stealthily and guiltily he slipped the ring into his pocket and took the paper up.

"Strange discovery at Folkestone. A little girl, digging in the sands, has found a gold watch and chain. It has been given to the police, and is believed to have belonged to the murdered Mr. Glynne." That was real, staring at him. So the sand had given up his secret. Even now they might have traced him.

Ring in hand, he slipped through the crowded streets. He let it drop suddenly, walking quickly on, and had not gone three paces before a child put it into his hands. He went to the foul, sullen canal, and saw it flash before it fell into the water. That was gone now. He turned away.

"Oh, it was so easy." Yet fear dogged him a little, drove him north to Newcastle—back again to Liverpool, a furtive, weary figure hiding in sordid lodgings, and yet still assured of his cleverness.

He took heart of grace in the huge shipping city. He would dare London and the diamonds. His

last change went on a new overcoat and a new suit of clothes. He got into the London express, planning the future, which was yet to be his, but with him now he carried a revolver. A stolid, dull-looking man got in with him, a conversational man, who spoke of the mysterious murder.

It was a good chance of hearing the opinion of outsiders. "Some tramp," said Martin carelessly, leaning back.

"No." The man shook his head. "Not at all. It was the junior partner. Lord! they've as good as traced him now. They can lay their hands on him when they want to."

The carriage swayed before Martin's eyes—a blood-red mist blurred his sight. Traced him! He gripped at his collar.

"I don't see how they could," he heard himself answering. "He—forgot—nothing. He seems to have got away cleverly. Anyone can if they take the trouble."

The bullet-faced man came nearer him.

"You don't know the police," he said, "they've detectives everywhere. A man's traced, he doesn't know how. There's the clue of the watch at Folkestone. They haven't lost that. In fact, I hear they're following him from there."

It was horrible to choke.

"I've done some work." The man leaned back. "I know. They always forget something, these murderers. They change their clothes, the colour of their hair, and walk about, wearing, perhaps,

some trumpery bit of jewellery which betrays them. The landladies suspect them, because they grow new beards and go out by dusk."

The horror of it gripped Martin as a steel trap. This man was playing with him. He knew everything, every ruse he had resorted to. As they neared London he would be arrested. He had left nothing undone. Yet this stupid-faced man had unravelled every carefully-twisted thread. The train rushed past the placid waters of the Dee, tearing Londonwards.

In one great wrench and tear his nerves fell to shreds; he shrieked in his agony—with a wild mixture of exasperation and relief.

"You know me!" he yelled, standing up, swaying as the train swayed. "Oh, you know me—Martin, the murderer—and you follow me to torture me. I cannot change my notes, for the numbers are known. You know I've dyed my hair, that I wore my signet-ring."

The stranger was up, gasping in astonishment.

"I killed him because he had no pity, but I'll not hang for it—I'll not—see! You bloodhound! I have my remedy!" There was a sharp report, and something lay shuddering on the carriage-floor.

Shouts—the attendants rushing in, the door shut, and yet the word drifted. It was Martin, the missing junior partner of James Glynne. The whispers flowed from carriage to carriage. A quiet, shabby-looking man ran down the passage, entered

the smoky carriage, and heard the story as it was poured out.

"And I," the bullet-headed man said in horror, "I'd nothing to do with the police. I never heard or dreamt of this being the murderer, except that I take an interest in detective stories and in criminal cases. I'm a commercial traveller. Oh, my God! It's awful for me!"

The shabby little man knelt by the figure which they had raised and laid on the seat.

"I was chief man on the case," he said simply. "The odd part of it was we'd completely lost trace of him. And the numbers of the notes were never known. Nor were we ever sure he did it. He made one of the cleverest disappearances on record. He had beaten us all round."

The man on the seat raised dimming eyes. He had heard and understood. A wry smile twisted his white lips.

"So—hang—easy—to beat you," he whispered. "But—now——" his mouth slacked. They covered his dead face gently and stood staring, as the express hummed Londonwards, at the body of the man who had neglected nothing in his escape.

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IX

RIDING A WINNER

“YOU see”—Peter Cavanagh pulled his pipe out and looked at the grey-blue sky—“the fact of the matter is that Marjorie cannot make up her mind whether she likes me or likes you and—we suffer.”

“Supposing she likes neither,” suggested Pat Fitzgerald, doubtfully.

“She has got to like one,” said Peter stolidly ; “there’s nothing to choose between our somewhat dilapidated old places—our incomes are both singularly small—I believe—I really believe that Marjorie would take whichever asked her first, and ‘live happily ever afterwards.’” His voice shook a little as he finished, and his eyes came back from the stretch of coarse-grassed, deep-pooled bog with the purple-shaded hills beyond, to his own rambling old house. Long and low and inornate as most Irish houses are, painted a cherry red, and with beds of sweet-scented flowers rioting before it. At the back were acres of walled-in yards ; and a huge sunny garden. Great woods sheltered the

place, and a small stream came mouthing and gurgling right past the lawn and through the garden.

Through a gap in the trees he could see Pat's house, a grey pile, standing gauntly clear upon the craggy hill, dark pines clustering round it. But there were lakes lying placidly at the foot of the crags. Lakes full of fish and good to boat on, and delicate shrubs which perished at Castle Cavanagh grew and flourished in the shelter by the water at Grainey.

Nothing to choose between their properties with a strip of fragrant-scented, snipe haunted bog running in front of both houses, and beyond that the best country in the world to hunt over, rolling upwards to the towering hills.

They owned half the mountain between them, the bog was shared also, the boundaries of their demesnes touched.

Peter was tall and dark and a little stolid, a studious man who read a great deal, who had been all over the world in his time, and could, as he expressed it himself, make himself misunderstood in most languages. He shot straight, he rode a hard but quiet hunt, seldom taking an unnecessarily big fence, showing little in a slow hunt, but when hounds really ran, it would be safe to assume that Peter was with them, and that it would take wire itself to stop him then from keeping his place.

Pat Fitzgerald was smaller, red headed, blue eyed, inexpressibly merry. His literary tastes had

not got beyond Jorrocks and rosy-hued weekly papers. He met life with a grin, and misfortune, which he declined to recognize, with a laugh of pure disdain. A pickle from his boyhood ; he and Peter had been sworn friends from the day when they fished together with bent pins and unhappy impaled worms in the trickling stream at Castle Cavanagh. And it was always Pat who fell into trouble and Peter who took him out. Pat who flopped full clothed into the lake to look for a lost fish and was fished out insensible. Pat who tumbled—scoffing at warnings—into the quaking bog, and was rescued, slime stifled and all but gone. Pat who blew off the tip of Peter's ear, rabbit-shooting, and weeping in apology, declared he had mistaken the other boy for a rabbit. They went through school together ; one quietly studious, playing in the first eleven, doing well in examinations ; the other who either hit up double figures or went out first ball ; who shirked every prep. and fell into every trouble he could find, and yet was such a favourite that some means were found for pulling " Paddy Fitz " straight.

Now Pat was the more brilliant shot of the two ; he rode young blood horses and could be seen pulling out right or left facing the blackest place, the widest ditch, the highest stone wall. Leading unfortunate followers up against wire which he was not above jumping, yet quiet, Peter finished the long hunts when Pat's horses were stone cold or deep in a ditch.

Had you asked at Cahervally who rode the hardest, Pat's name would come on to fifty lips.

"Peter's a quiet chap, rides a nice hunt, but Pat—Pat's a demon to hounds. Jumped the iron gates y'know down at Power's place—swam the Deel in flood near Kilgraney." The few who judged Peter best said little.

And now love had cast a cloud upon their friendship. There had come to Ballywilliam, the half-ruined home of the Desterres, a man called Crane, who had made his millions in America and came home to the land he loved best to spend it all.

Ballywilliam's crumbling walls were reared afresh ; the huge garden was re-stocked ; pineries and vineries and peach houses sprang into glittering life ; new slates covered the leaking roof ; handsome furniture filled the big rooms, before Corney Crane and his daughter appeared in a motor to take up their residence in Ireland.

Marjorie Crane was a sweet-faced, bright-eyed girl, with grey eyes and fair brown hair. She took to her Irish life with the keen joy of youth, and ere three months had passed knew that Peter Cavanagh and Pat Fitzgerald were her slaves for life. They were over every day upon some pretext. Peter wanted to show her where the ghost walked by the ruined tower ; Pat took her to the river teaching her how to throw a line. She rode fearlessly through one happy, careless winter ; led over impossible places when she followed Pat ; seeing good hunts more easily when Peter was her pilot ; talked to them, danced with them ; laughed with them through the clear springtide, when the willows hung

tassels on the banks and brown trout were to be caught in the river ; drank Ireland's soft skies and winds until they were part of her life, and now in the summer-time sometimes wondered what might happen, for things grew more serious between the two men. They watched each other lest one of them should go alone to Ballywilliam ; they bought sweets and books and music for the girl as their fancy dictated. They were frank about it to each other, which saved deeper enmity ; each one acknowledging the deepness of his cause, with no effort to cut the ground from the other's feet.

“ We must know soon.” Peter whistled to his dogs. “ We must know soon, Pat, and then one goes away, and hey for a lifelong friendship gone down—for it would take me time, Pat, to see you married to her.”

“ Only time, old boy. Let the right man win, and there will come a day when the other will be here again—best friend as of old.” Pat's voice was unusually soft. “ Even Marjorie couldn't part us, Peter mine. Come to Ballywilliam.”

Hand gripped hand as they started, and for a space neither spoke, for something choked their voices as they went. Out under the branching trees, where the sun flung a fret of shade upon the thick moss, across the bog—all white with bog cotton, fragrant with wild mint and thick-flowered meadow-sweet. Deep-hued, mysterious pools lurked by the stacks of peat ; tiny stunted bushes

were aleaf on the spongy soil. Then into the trimmer woods of Ballywilliam; with rides cut across them, and green-coated keepers popping out to see who intruded, and up to the stately old house which money had made young again.

A girl, swinging in a hammock under a huge beech, raised her head as if she expected them.

"I knew you would come over to cheer me up," she said gaily. "I funk'd the Iever's garden party, and here I am with nothing to do. Now wasn't it nice of you not to go too?"

"Pat thought," said Peter ingratiatingly, "you'd get a motor out and run over to see his horses training for the show—then I ordered tea."

Here Pat announced that he had also ordered tea, and they stared at each other desperately.

"Castle Cavanagh hot cakes are made of feathers," said Miss Crane decidedly. "We'll go on there. Order the motor, please. I am ready, Dad," she called—"I am going to see horses schooled."

"My dear, you live for horses." Crane, tall, lean, with the leather-tanned skin of the Colonial, came to his study window. He might have expected great things for his daughter, but he seemed content to see her make her choice between the two young Irishmen, one of whom discussed books and lands and many sports with him; and the other made him laugh in his most depressed moments.

He had money enough, and he wanted his daughter to settle close to him.

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The green motor came purring to the door, and they slipped away along the flat bog road; then upwards by sharp turns and steep ascents to the big gates of Grainey. The car panted up the steep avenue, drawing up at the oaken door, for Grainey was built in imitation of a medieval castle, with narrow window slits, and a huge banqueting hall and dangerous winding stone stairways.

The stables were on a lower level, down long flights of steps. Here order reigned. Some of the horses were still out, but four, getting ready for the Dublin Horse Show, poked lean, kindly-eyed faces from their open doors.

There were two sleek and plump and shining, in dealer's condition, as Pat said proudly, and two, which were to jump, harder and more muscular.

They looked at Starlight and Danny, the five-year-olds for sale, and then at Actress, a clean-bred mare, and, lastly, at Simon Pure, a light-middled, nervous-looking chestnut, with St. Simon blood in him.

"He goes all right?" asked Marjorie, watching the chestnut shrink as they saddled him.

"He'll go—for me. But if I put James up to ride him he'll refuse and do everything wrong. This one of mine and Peter's Vicker ought to run each other close for first prize. They are both perfection.

Pat had built up a course with wall, double bank, and water jump, and a huge ragged wall reared by itself, for competition for the championship. The horses were consistent prize-winners, for he schooled

them with some tricks borrowed from abroad, sheet-iron for the water jump, terrifying them if they landed in ; and the other fences were child's play to Irish hunters.

He and Peter got up, taking their cracks round the course. Vicker fenced perfectly, if a little slowly ; Simon Pure, more brilliant, would gain the clapping of the crowd. The chestnut was a hot, awkward goer, one touch of his bridle setting him wild. It was pretty to see Pat, absolutely fearless, flashing round upon him, sitting perfectly still, guiding the horse with his knee more than bridle.

" You'll beat me, Pat," said Peter, getting off. " Yours is a typical show jumper. You'll beat me," he said slowly and a little sadly, for Marjorie was patting the chestnut's damp, satiny neck, and Pat was smiling down at her, his boyish, merry face alight, his little strong figure sitting easily on the fidgeting horse.

They had never resisted Pat at school. Matron, sorely tried masters, boys had all bowed to the fascination of the Irish idler. " It would be the same now," thought Peter quickly, as Pat's second horse came out to have its school. A fair performer, she was nowhere following the other two.

" Well, the Horse Show will decide it," said Marjorie, as they went back to the car. " Peter or Pat—will be victor then."

" The Horse Show must decide it," echoed Peter half to himself.

Clicking turnstiles, endless rushing up of motors and other vehicles ; all the sporting world to worship King Horse in his royal state, and for the best part of a week.

Horses innumerable, pouring out of the arched entrances ; prancing merrily to the rings ; returning ridden by dejected owners, who vowed all judging rotten, and this particular assortment only fit to decide on the merits of donkeys—kept in men smirked anxiously, watching for the judge's eye to be cast upon their mount. Dealers peered, lynx-eyed, from the rails ; Frenchmen chattered volubly, buying freely. It was a record show even for Dublin ; prices ruled high and everything worth looking at was being sold.

Starlight and Danny, one second and one reserved, had provided their owner with funds for a winter's hunting ; Peter's Merrymaid was also sold. Judging anxiously, criticizing freely, Marjorie trotted from ring to ring, always—save when they had to ride their horses—with her two attendants at either side.

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Pat hung upon her judgments and agreed to them all ; Peter ventured quietly to contradict her.

"He hasn't bad hocks, has he, Pat ?" She had fallen into the way of calling them by their Christian names as everyone else did.

"Grand hocks," said Pat stoutly, kicking Peter.

"There, you see," she said triumphantly.

"I also see—the hocks," said Peter—"there, out

he goes." For the horse, a showy bay, came out of the ring with a string of others.

Marjorie had grown spoilt. She took it up as a grievance.

"I'll buy him," she flashed, and stopped the horse with a wave of her hand.

In ten minutes she returned, flushed and triumphant—conscious that she had done a foolish thing and eyeing Peter doubtfully.

"I've bought him," she said, "if he passes."

"And if you don't fire him before this time next year, call me an idiot," said Peter coolly, braving his love's fiery glance.

After luncheon upon the second day, the two stood together at the clock waiting for Marjorie. She had gone back to change her morning coat and skirt for the fluffy confection of the jumping ring, and they were taking her in.

Both were in riding kit ready for the fray. The air was heavy in the central hall, heavy and hot. Peter, switching at the ground with his hunting crop, spoke suddenly.

"Pat, old boy," he said nervously.

"Yes—I know," said Pat. And they stared at each other.

"Pat, she can't make up her mind. She looks at us, and wonders—shall—we—toss for first chance, old man."

First chance—for Marjorie. His heart thumped as he spoke.

"No—we'll let fate decide it. One must beat

the other to-day, even if we don't win. Let the victor take tea with Marjorie, and—try his luck. It will be something to know."

"Done," said Peter quietly. And Marjorie, radiant in something ethereal, came fluttering in. The people behind her hat were not likely to see much. Corney Crane, lean and sallow, was with her.

"And who——" said Marjorie as they went out into the blazing sunshine, "will take me to tea? Father's leaving early."

"That—depends," said Peter quietly. "I—may not be able to."

The girl shot a quick glance at him as they passed into the jumping enclosure.

Jumping must always be a little monotonous. But Marjorie followed it all with eager eyes, and to two men taking part there was life and death beneath them at each jump. Fortune ordained that they should come out together—Vicker and Simon Pure—and both put in a faultless, loudly clapped round, 15 and 18, both numbers went up. Armagh Lad, a grey from the north, was the only thing they feared.

Out again, and no judge could have chosen between them. When they came in, Pat jumped off, standing in the shade of his horse—for the sun was grilling. Next moment he staggered with a cry of pain, as Greensleeves, a hot bay mare, dealt him an accurately placed kick straight against his shin. Pat reeled about, groaning, Peter springing to his side.

The time was approaching when they must go out again.

"No use, old boy. I'm in agony—ride for me," groaned Pat. "They'll call for us separately, now. Don't touch his head, Peter, as you love me." In the excitement of his hurt he had forgotten their compact.

Peter's heart throbbed. "If Simon Pure did not win he had the right to speak."

"Don't touch his head, Peter," repeated Pat.

"I'll do my best," Peter said steadily. He had not forgotten—15 and 18 to come alone. It lay between the two.

Vicker, quiet and docile, was yet a little bored. The steel was out of her as she fenced, without fault, yet not with her previous fire.

Then the chestnut, fidgeting, was brought up. A minute to adjust the stirrups—a minute and an evil thought found time to perch on Peter's shoulder. Supposing Simon Pure did not like him—lost his temper—then the prize was his. He flung the thought off as they flashed out at racing pace in and out and over the wall, but he clung and stayed.

As Peter steadied to go round, Pat's horse flung up his head at the first touch on the bit.

What if he steadied him, whispered the clinging thought—touched the reins, held the hot rushing brute. Who would know? It meant first chance with the girl he loved—there was so much he could say, and he—knew he could make her happy.

"Pull," whispered something. "It's only natural—pull."

It takes time to write—it was no time as they galloped on.

"Pull," it said. "Who can blame you?—the compact holds—pull."

Simon Pure flung up a fretted head.

Then with hands down, hands which left the reins loose, Peter rushed at the bank and something slipped from his shoulder. Win or lose he must do his best for Pat. Round the curve, over the water with a glorious sail, amid the round of applause.

18 went up—Simon Pure had won.

People were climbing down off the stands, going out for tea. Pat no doubt had gone out already with Marjorie—the compact held. Pat could make opportunities. He would take her out under the trees, and use that winning voice of his.

"Bad luck, Peter, having to beat your own mare."

"I would have been beaten in any case." Peter trudged away with drooping head. Somehow he knew he could have made the girl happy, been ballast to her careless nature.

There was brilliant sunshine overhead, blue skies, and a faint cool breeze, but to Peter Cavanagh the day was dull and downcast.

He strolled down through the crowds, and as he thought—Marjorie's place was empty. She had gone to tea with Pat.

Slowly, with dragging feet he went out of the

enclosure and being parched with thirst up into the crowded tea pavilion. Seated by a window, he saw Marjorie and Pat. Pat's face was very pale, his smile came with a strange twist.

Peter went up to them. "Well—you won, Pat," he said. "And your leg——"

"It aches, Peter." There was a new note in Pat's careless voice.

"You—look sad," said Marjorie.

"Sad." Peter pulled himself together. "No. I was merely thinking. I'm off on my travels again soon. I shan't be at home for next winter."

His face was brave, but his heart was lead. How happy they looked—Marjorie and his friend.

But Pat rose, limping.

"Take your tea, Peter," he said huskily. "One may win—and lose. Ballast tells, old boy—and—I'm off."

Peter sat down slowly.

"He told you," he said. "He won the right."

Marjorie made an elaborate pattern with cake crumbs.

"The right to—lose——" she half whispered.

The tea room wheeled before Peter's eyes. "You mean—Marjorie—He's always won. Do you mean you like this sober old fellow best?"

"I—always did——" muttered Marjorie. "And—the horse had weak hocks, Peter."

"I wish to goodness—we weren't here," said Peter quietly.

The world cleared. It was sunshine outside, clean

and sweet, yet looking down there was bitter in the cup. Pat—radiant, merry Pat—was limping slowly away.

“Thank God I didn’t,” cried Peter, as he told her of his temptation.

“You couldn’t have,” she said with simple trust. “And—some day—we’ll make it up to Pat, Peter.”

Peter, looking at his friend, wondered if he could.

X

RETURNED UNOPPOSED

MR. BOHUN disagreed, blandly. He sat in the smoking-room of the *Ulster* as she thrashed her way across a choppy sea, and aired his views upon the Irish Question. The Irish only wanted to hear reason. They were intelligent—they would grasp it. Why not have an Englishman to plead their cause in England? A man with property in the country, of course.

Henry Francis Bohun was tall, thin, clean shaved, slightly fatuous of expression, and wore glasses. He was clearly a man of eloquence.

The Rev. Patrick Murphy, one of the listeners, looked at him curiously. He asked mildly if the Englishman was going to Ireland for the first time. On Mr. Bohun promptly replying that he had been to the Horse Show, the priest said, "My, my," softly.

"This time," observed Francis Bohun, "I am going to Lisnadon."

"To races and an election," said Father Pat, thoughtfully. He went on to remark that he'd heard

some loonatic was comin' to oppose Dennis Raffarty. "The poor felly, God help him," he added.

"Why God help him?" said Bohun, a little faintly.

Father Pat advised him kindly to throw away the cigar if it troubled him, for he was lookin' sickly. "Because—well, because how could he understand?" he said simply.

The rose flush on Bohun's cheek mocked at sea sickness. In heavy tones he announced his intention to try to understand, for, his thin voice grew strident, he was Henry Francis Bohun, coming as a new landowner to contest the seat, for Ireland and her Cause. The foretaste of his eloquence rang across the smoking-room, ringing in ponderous periods. The Irish must listen, must see light. He had money—would want no payment. He would make any crowd see reason.

"God help," began Father Pat.

"Who?" asked Mr. Bohun, with reserved irritation.

"The world," said Father Pat, going out. "I'm priest at Lisnadon, ye see," he said.

Mr. Bohun, full of his mission, travelled to stay with the McHinty's, Scotch people, who had taken his new place for the shooting. He plunged at dinner into politics; he was visited in the morning by dubious and thoughtful agents, and he grew sadly worn by the Irish House Party who refused to take him seriously.

Now the fever of money-making which dominates

mankind fell upon Henry Bohun. At the races he backed the winner of the first race, giving the money to Ryan to put on, and again the winner of the second, and yet was not pleased, for in each case he laid odds on, while he had distinctly heard outside shouts of two to one against. His remonstrances with the bookmakers were met with scant civility. "Does one only bet in Tattersall's here?" he asked irritably of Ryan.

Desmond Ryan flung an eloquent eye upon the Irish Tattersalls and choked silently. He returned, after a time, that man could bet where he chose, but that Erin would win the race.

"Two to one," sounded a hoarse voice. "Twos Erin."

Mr. Bohun observed, "Will you?" spitefully. He took instead a pass from the man at the gate and passed out on to the race-course. Some active dodging of Aunt Sally's and rifle ranges landed him by the smaller pencillers with their crowds of eager-faced clients pressing round them.

"Give me threes, sir. Do now. There is a gerril's shillin'." "I'll get it from your betthers then." "Here, a croon, Airin."

Mr. Bohun took observations. He settled on a thin man in a grimy shepherd's plaid suit, mounted upon a stand, bearing the name of James Mulcahy. The Trew Blew Firrim. "Two to wan, Airin," said Mr. Mulcahy engagingly.

Mr. Bohun pulled out a ten-pound note. "Erin," he said pompously, not noticing Mr. Mulcahy's gasp

and hesitation. "Twinty pound to two Airin," whispered the bookmaker cautiously. Bohun's doom, had he known it, was sealed. Dirty fingers closed on the crisp note. The clerk noted no bet. Mr. Mulcahy fingered it, sighed, and looked up to heaven. He had had a bad meeting, and already thought of a bolt. He looked no longer at heaven, but towards the station, and when he had feverishly absorbed every coin he could finger he put his lips to his clerk's ear.

"We can just do the 2.30. Put on ye're coat an' run," he whispered softly.

Mr. Bohun, delighting in the geniality of the crowd, though he wished they would not play Aunt Sally, got back and watched the race. Erin jumped like a bird, and coming away at the distance won in a hack canter, amid ominous silence from the bookmakers, who were hard hit. Bohun had listened coldly to damping statements from his fellow-guests. They had laid money on and he had got odds ; he picked his way forth loftily.

The box of the Trew Blew Firrim was as yet empty, and surrounded by a good-humoured, well-pleased crowd. Mr. Bohun objected to being hustled. He thought he would get up and see if his bookmaker was coming.

He sprang lightly on to the box, and to his surprise the crowd surged in about him.

"Five shillings, sir. Two and six here. Two bob, Mister," a score of tickets were thrust at his gloved hands.

They took him for the bookmaker. He shuddered.

"My good men, I owe you nothing," observed Mr. Bohun carelessly, still staring over their heads.

"An' what's that, an' that, an' that." They surged in hotly now.

"Have done with ye're blather an' pay us," said a big man sharply.

"Good heavens!" observed Bohun, adjusting his eyeglasses and contemplating descent. "I owe you nothing, my good man," he said pleasantly, mentally observing the intelligence of the face.

"Gimme me money or we'll mark ye," returned the man fiercely. The angry faces came nearer; grew in number. The story was told back. James Mulcahy refused to pay.

"One moment," said Bohun. "Look at me, my good fellows. Just look."

"We will," said a voice.

Someone pushed Bohun down, and when they pushed him up again he was dishevelled and muddy.

Eloquence trembled on his lips, came forth, and yet the task of dealing with this Irish crowd was not so easy. They did not listen kindly; they closed and muttered and clamoured, until cold fear became clammy to Bohun's heart. They would not believe him.

"Good God! Do I look like a Welsher?" he shouted piteously.

"Ye look the damdest vilyin iver we saw," said someone crisply, hitting Mr. Bohun's pot hat down over his eyes.

"I am Henry Bohun," cried the man feebly. "I—and—you won't listen." Then he did the worst thing he could have done, made a bolt for the stand, to be engulfed by a sea of enemies.

"Won't pay us, won't ye, ye schamer? Howld him, Mickey. Up in the box with him, till we bate him at our convaynince."

Hatless, muddy, bleeding, giddy, Mr. Bohun's thin voice now shrieked his explanation. He was not, not Mulcahy.

"An' ye havin' his pipper an' salty soot on ye; an' ye're specs sot over in one eye," yelled an infuriated voice. "Array, we'll tache ye. Tear the money from him, boys."

Wailing "Listen to reason," Mr. Bohun was hustled from man to man. Sticks, fortunately restricted by the press, fell on him; fists battered him, as he spun in the human cocoon of his own weaving, shouting, but faintly now, for reason.

"That ass is in trouble," said Desmond Ryan looking down. "Here! They're killing him." He ceased to laugh, for he heard his name called faintly.

"We'll rayson ye," boomed an irritated giant who had come to get ten shillings. "Up agin' the railin's, Mulcahy from Dublin, an' pay up."

The battered blinded remains of Mr. Bohun were hurled to the railings, where a wave of stalwart police hurtled suddenly in to his rescue, and flung him speechless and voiceless to the shelter of the stand amid a yell of baffled fury from the crowd.

In a surge of fighting humanity, a reek of whisky-

and-porter-tainted breaths, of clamour and whirling sticks, he had got away. He clung heavily to the arm of Constable Blake, who wiped some mud from him kindly. The whole world outside seemed to surge in on his heels.

"I will—speak to them now," said Bohun faintly, opening his uninjured eye.

"They're spakin' themselves, I'd say," observed Constable Blake drily, and counselled brandy-and-soda.

They were! A thunderous orator borne shoulder high, roared ultimatum. "Unless she murdtherer of a vilyinous chate was immediately given up to thim, faix, they would pull down the shtand house an' take him."

"They manes it too," said Constable Blake equably, fingering his truncheon.

The mud-bespattered black-eyed remnants of Henry Bohun got up and swayed irresolutely. "Tell them to let me speak," he said, "to make them hear reason."

Someone shrieked explanation from inside. It was hurled back in a clamour of refutation. The woodwork groaned as the great mass of men flung themselves suddenly against the door.

"Get to it! Inside! Quickly! They'll break in!"

A few hundred pressed their weights against five times their number. Ladies scurried nervously to the top of the stand; faces grew anxious.

Mr. Bohun seized some boxes; he built a tower and climbed to its top.

"My good men," he began, to be greeted by a yell which sent him trembling to Mother Earth.

"They will reely do a mischief if we don't stop them," said Raffarty thoughtfully. Mr. Bohun was replaced on the edifice of boxes by a merry-eyed little man in a tweed coat, whose size was no herald to the bass roar which sped from him.

"Aisy there, ye idjits!" he shot out above the uproar. "Wait till I talk to ye. Ye gomacks!" howled Dennis Raffarty, M.P. "Who did ye say, Mr. Ryan? A poor fool of a stranger that wint better outside."

"My God!" said Bohun softly.

"I'll tell ye who he is! Ye're bookie isin Dublin."

He roared the truth at them furiously.

Back came the sullen answer that the man had the same clothes on him, an' glasses in his face.

Then Desmond Ryan got nimbly to the M.P.'s side. "This gentleman you—hurt," he began. They knew him well.

"Is Susanna here?" came loudly and sullenly.

Susanna was Ryan's mare, entered for the next race. He guessed what was coming.

Then by all their gods they swore if they were not given up the man in the "pipper an' salty soot" that racing should cease and Susanna not run.

"Instead of that you dunderheads, go and back her," boomed Ryan good-humouredly.

"Yes, back her, ye idjits," echoed Raffarty, "and send in a dacent man or two to see the poor gentleman you have kilt. There'll be jail on

this," he added. "What is ye're name, sir?" to Bohun.

"Henry Francis Bohun," said that gentleman heavily.

"Me God!" Raffarty surged on his castle. "Him that was to contest the sate."

He shouted the news out, with relish. "Come here to stand for Parliament, and dead as mutton from the batin' he has, hardly able to sthand on his feet or spake his name. Be off an' back Susanna. An' ye'd better return him to make it up to him," he grinned.

"But! Are you not going to make any arrests?" demanded Bohun of the stout constable who still supported him.

"Arrests! God save ye! Would ye arrest the nation?" said Blake mildly. "If they get so far to kill ye now, 'twould be another matther, ov course."

In an English paper a short time later an election result was given.

"Lisnadon West. Mr. D. Raffarty, Redmondite. Returned unopposed."

Mr. Bohun, reading the announcement, looked down Piccadilly, as one who looks on safety.

XI

THROOSH

A LEGEND OF LOCK GUR

IF ye climb the hills with their crop of sthones stickin' out here an' there, ye'll come to the grey lake nestlin' down in the hollows, with the edges ov it lappin' soft through the reeds, an' chasin' the land up to the very hills, with little rivulets an' bit streams of silvery wather, until the sthones dhrives it back, an' the grass is green an' dhry. An' thin if ye goes on inland ye'll find the old Rath with its belt ov thorns, that does be a ring of swate white in May, with the goulden primmeroses shinin' like sthars on the bank. An' here in the ould days the fairies be out o' nights, dancin' light across the grass, swingin' in the cups of the thorn blossom, or maybe sittin' discreet an' gentale in a ring while the King, Fierna, discoursed. An' there among them all, suckin' his little pipe wid the resht, ye'd see little Throosh, the tiniest of them all, wid his sharp little eyes lookin' soft at Fiona, the King's dather, an' she in shimmerin' green, wid her goulden hair floatin'. An' besides Throosh, Noreen, a little

fairy no bigger than himself, that'd give him an odd pinch or a dig with a thorn whin he'd look too admirin' at the Princess, for they two were promised.

Now there was war, war, war in thim days, always war between the land fairies an' thim ov the wather. An' worse it got whin Cruskeen, the cowl'd-eyed, web-footed King ov the Loch, sot his eyes on Princess Fiona an' she sittin' on the big sthone that marked the boundthry of her counthry, an' sint messengers askin' for her for his Queen. Begonnes! the Rath King sint him wurds back that warrumed his cowl'd ears, an' the war was bitherer than ivir.

An' thin, the Princess was that naughty an' wilful, she would be stayin' near the lake, laffin' to see the wather fairies comin' up to look at her, an' one day she sthayed too close, an' with wan schreech she was swhep in an' carried off.

So now the fairies sat solemn in the Rath, cryin' soft, an' the King'd hang his head and thrample the yelly flowers in his anger, an' sorra the thing cud he do. For if the Princess sthayed in the power of the wather fairies one year an' a day, then was she gone from her people for ivir, an' must sthay down in the cowl'd sorryful wather as Cruskeen's Queen. Pitiful messages she'd sind, and little fairies flew off at first light an' gaylike, but none ivir come back agin, but was tuk prisoners an' kep'.

So then, this night in early May, the Rath fairies sat bither an' sad, the min suckin' pipes an' the gerrils cryin' doleful.

“An’ now there is but two weeks left to us,” says Fierna, says he, liftin’ up his head. “An’ that impident vilyin,” says he, “sinds me a message be the wather-burrd, that on the last night ov the year, the Princess will be brought up, will walk three times around the lake. But, cowslips and thorn buds, what gud is that at all, at all, whin none can get near to her?”

“I would like,” says Throosh, says he, “to thry to rescue the Princess.” For all had thried an’ failed. An’ he was the only man who had not, for none thought he cud be of use.

“Yerra, Wisha! What next!” says Noreen, laffin’. “Do ye think ye’re so smhall,” says she, “they would miss seein’ ye?”

“I don’t rightly know,” says Throosh, cross-like. “Fair maybe, ’tis the bad bargain Cruskeen’ll get whin her tongue do be givin’ at him.” An’ he slipped away, for the heart was heavy in him. He had loved Fiona greatly, she bein’ always swheet to him, an’ he could not bear to see the gran’ King, an’ he frettin’, frettin’ for his dather.

So he rose light into the air an’ flew into the night, an’ whin he was some ways gone, he saw an ould wummun gotherin’ sthicks an’ two little rapscallions of wood fairies an’ they takin’ thim off her. Down flew little Throosh, all in his green. “Let the dacent wummun be, boys,” says he, shrill an’ angry.

With that they laffed and med for him, but he sthud up, brave an’ quiet.

“Touch a Rath fairy an’ ye dare! Ye brown

vilyins," says Throosh, says he, "an' find out what 'twill bring ye."

Seein' the green dhress of him they ran off, and Throosh picked up the kippines an' put them on his back.

The ould wummun was cryin' over her wurk.

"I will take thim home for ye, Mother," says he. "Ye bein' wake an' ould."

"An' that is good of ye, sthrong man," says she, very grave; but the grey eyes of her laffed in her head, an' the lines of age seemed to play like wather above a smooth skhin.

So Throosh carried the sthicks to a little cabin door, an' sat talkin' an' she askin' questions ov him. An' then she pulled somethin' out ov her apron pocket an' gave it to him—'twas a bit ov a crab apple brown an' withered.

"Take it," says she, "an' whin ye'd want to be someone else, kiss it an' wish. An' good-bye an' thank ye, sthrong man," says she. "There was others passed this way that did but laff at a poor ould wummun an' her sthicks. An' thry to rescue the Princess," says she. "Ye might succeed."

An' with that the night darkened and the cottage flickered in the gloom ov it, an' there was no ould wummun and no house; but somewheres above him Throosh thought he saw a face fearsome in its loveliness, and he fluthered off. For there was but one so lovely—the great witch, Moira Dhuv, that ruled all Fairyland, an' 'twas bad to see her at all. He flew off be the great lake, shimmerin' grey an'

lonesome in the dark, an' home to rest until next night, an' said no wurrid of what he'd seen. But the days slhipped an' passed—until he cud wait no longer, for more fairies had gone and come back frightened like or remained away, an' 'twas the last night ov all when Fierna the Rath King must see his dather out on the cowld wathers, an' little Throosh was up and winged away, unbeknownt to all. Down an' on to the great lake, the wesht wind ripplin' it, an' the sob ov it whisperin' through the reeds, an' the lap ov it fightin' the pebbles on the land. He came discreet and soft-like, hidin' behind the big sthones, an' who shud he see out close to the big boundthry bowldther but a big man wid a black beard an' a kind of a cowld look about him. An' Throosh passed the time ov night to him, aisy an' civil.

“ From the Rath, are ye ? ” says the man, says he, laffin'. “ Oh, but there are a few ov ye below, cowld an' sad,” says he. “ An' have ye come to rescue ye're swate Princess ? ” says he, grinnin'.

Now Throosh looked down an' saw the feet the man was tuckin' away out of sight and the splayed hands ov him, an' the dreepin' look about his beard, an' he knew 'twas the King himself.

“ I am not,” says he. “ Bein' too small, they niver sint me ; but I am come,” says he, “ to see her walk around the loch an' to see the King of the Loch, that they say is terrible ould an' ugly.”

“ Huh ! ” says the big man, coughin'. “ Huh ! ”

“ An' to throw an ill wish at him,” says Throosh,

says he, vicious like, "for darin' to carry off a dacent gerril from the Rath, whin a fish'd match him."

"Huh!" says the King, says he. An' he slhapped the fire out of his pipe and med to put the top on. "Quare manners they tache ye," says he, "in the Rath. Fishes an' weeds, where is the green vilyin?" says he, for Throosh had touched an' tried his apple and was within in Cruskeen's pipe hid away cosy an' comfortable.

"Gone back home," says the King, and wint shufflin' an' cripplin' across the shore. "Oh, I see ye all around," he says, laffin'.

Already the sthones was gettin' covered with the little Rath fairies that dared not come down to the lake, an' the King himself was howldin' the Queen's hand and biddin' her not to be bawlin' so loud an' disgracin' him. Down went the Loch King through the grey wathers. Down to the still soft bottom of the loch with fishes dippin' to him as he passed, an' a great bustle goin' on, and little web-futted fairies lightin' lamps, an' great sthir entirely. The King took the top off his pipe an' little Throosh slhipped undther a weed to hide. Oh', 'twas grey an' lonesome there, with nivir a gleam ov sun or a yelly or white flower, but the brown weeds floatin', floatin' in the grey, an' the still, cool silence of it all. . . . Then Throosh thought of the apple an' he touched it an' wished, an' was like one ov the little guards that was flowtherin' around, so that he could be at his aise amongst them. So he hurried along with all the fishes dartin', and was afeard he

might be chose for supper until he heard someone weepin', weepin' close by, an' he saw a dour in a rock an' wished himself through, an' there there was the little Princess all in her shimmerin' green, with the soft gould hair fallin' round her, but the purty pink washed out ov her cheeks an' her big eyes afeard.

Throosh touched his apple an' there he was, an' she let wan screech, an' fell on him, kissin' him an' cryin'.

"Throosh, little Throosh from the Rath. An' the green dhress ov you, an' the primmeroses in yer cap. An' is it settled, Throosh? Oh, am I saved, that ye are here?"

"It is not," says Throosh, says he. "An' don't be kissin' me agin, Fiona," says he, "for there's one'll be questionin' me whin I gets home."

"Home," says she, with her voice like to the sob of the south wind. "Home—with the grass around me, an' the flowers starrin' it, and the wind whisperin' through the thorns, an' the blue sky above. An' here the cowl'd, the grey, grey cowl'd," says she. "Oh, Throosh, take me home."

"Don't be bawlin'," says Throosh, says he. "For I have a great magic." An' he up an' tills her all about his apple.

"Thin, 'tis aisy as aisy," cried Fiona, clappin' her little hands. "Give it to me, Throosh, quick," says she, "an' I'll wish meself to be like a wather fairy an' be away an' home in ten minyets onst I can git up."

“Av coorse,” says Throosh doubtfully, “that’d settle it. But ye see, there’s meself. Faix an’ the weather is cowld, and a pike’s bite is no dacent ind.”

“Oh, Vo, Vo,” sobbed she, “thin what will we do at all, at all?”

“The King,” says a voice outside, “is waitin’ on the Princess.”

“H’sh!” says Throosh, says he. “Go out to him. An’ spake him fair, an’ ask him to let ye go, an’ if I niver sees the grass agin,” says he, “ye shall be free.”

So he changed agin and followed Fiona. There was a dhress ready, and he all of glittherin’ fishes’ scales, but she would not put it on, but walked in her fadin’ green, until she came to where King Cruskeen sat up on his throne of shells, and he glittherin’ in scales an’ terrible ugly to see.

“Fiona of the Rath,” says he. “Will ye marry me willin’?”

Fiona sthud up, so swate and forlorn and proud that the King might have been moved, had he not had a fish’s heart in him.

“Cruskeen of the Loch,” says she, “I niver will. As to forcin’ me,” says she, “ye will have but a poor droopin’ Queen with the heart in her achin’ for her own green land and the moonshine an’ the flowers. Let me go, King,” says she, “home to me father. Oh, let me go.”

“Ye are too swate, Fiona,” says he, lookin’ at the loveliness ov her. “So since ye will not wed me

willin', go and get ready for the lasht look at the green land which I must give ye, and then ye will belong to me," says he, "and be me wife befour the dawn."

She said no wurrud then, but curtseyed so hopeless and proud that Throosh was nigh to cryin'. But he threw a little sthone instead, an' cot the King in the eye and hurt him sore, and none knew where it come from.

"Och murther ! murther !" says the King, says he. "I will have a black eye for me weddin'," says he. An' he clapped a passin' pike to it to cool it.

Back then they wint, but Throosh had thought ov somethin', an' he waitin'. Whin the dour shut an' the Princess beganned to cry he tore the apple in two havles.

"Och worrassthue," sobbed the Princess. "If I cannot have yer magic, Throosh, I will nivir see the Rath again."

Throosh gave her the half of the apple, whisperin' very eager. "Wish yourself me," says he. An' then he danced, for there was two Rath fairies in the rock prison. An' a great plan was in his head.

A few minyits later the gyards came knockin' an' the Princess waited for them, and they rose up. Ye see, there was this to privint them escapin' too aisy. No strange fairy could get to the top of the loch without bein' took by a wather fairy, so they must be up befour they cud git away.

And up they went through the cowl'd weather, an' then the heart lepped in Throosh as he saw the

sthars in the sky, an' the dim hump ov the hills, an' saw the Rath fairies flutherin' far off. But he sthud up very discrately, for he had the Princess Fiona's shape on him and was by the King's side.

"Do ye see," says Cruskeen, very cruel, "all me gyards ringin' the shore? Smhall hope ye have of gettin' off," says he; "and now," says he, "walk around and soon ye will be mine for iver."

"Smhall," says Throosh, says he, "but sure I'll be wid you, Cruskeen Alanna," says he, an' he squz the King's hand till it near bled.

"Murther! murther!" says the King, wringin' it an' hoppin'. "Ye're very swate all ov a suddint," says he, suckin' his finger.

"'Twas shy I was," says Throosh, droopin' his head hard agin the King's bruised eye.

But the King was glad, hurt as he was. For she was so fair, with the yelly hair around her, and her colour pink again.

"An' now," he says, coaxin'. "I have a wish,"—says he, "to be wed on dhry land. Carry me up," says Throosh, "to the bouldthers there to put the ring on me finger. Sure I am yours now," says he.

"But," says Cruskeen, says he. "There! don't be bawlin'—I will—for ye'll niver see land agin."

An' so the great thrain ov thim stumbled on to the land, until the Banshee grumbled, an' the wather fairies said they be sneezin' in the mornin', an' Throosh, edgin' nearer and nearer to the boundthry sthone, saw a little gyard shippin' inland an' heard a great fluther ov wings a minyit later. Then he

stud up very proud an' simple, an' the King looked for his ring.

"For we must hurry," says he. "The dacent Banshee her is losht out ov the wather," says he. "An' so—put on that bridal dhress," says he.

Very close to the sthone—a fluther—a little green fairy among all their grey, and a great hep ov a dhress lyin' on the sthones.

"The top ov the mornin' to ye, King Cruskeen, *Alanna*," says Throosh, caperin' off well behind the boundthry.

Well, such murther niver you heard. The Banshee keenin' an' the King roarin', an' the wather fairies howlin', an' onst out ov the night Throosh thought he saw a face lookin' so lovely 'twould make you afeard, and heard a wummun's laff.

"Where is Fiona?" roared the King. "An' how did ye git doun alone?"

"She shud be in the Rath be now," says Throosh, says he. "I wint doun in yer pipe, Cruskeen *Alanna*, since I had no power to go alone. An' I thank ye kindly for the help. There, now. Ye know ye have no power over me beyant yer own place." An' with that he cot two gyards, nate and clever, an' an ould wather fairy that was dhryin' up, an' barginned them for his comrades below. So that before he wint they were brought up, an' let go home to the Rath.

"Don't be disappointin' the dacent Banshee then," says Throosh, laffin, "that hasn't a death screech left in her now. But marry one of thim

coleens," says he, "that's used to yer ugliness." An' with a light fluther Throosh was gone.

"An' ye saved us—ye saved me!" cried Fiona, comin' to him as he flew in. "Oh, what, what can I do for ye, Throosh?"

"Faix, let me be," says Throosh, lookin' skewways at Noreen, "for 'twouldn't do to be too fond of me, Fiona!"

"I suppose they nivir noticed ye, ye are so smhall," says Noreen, says she, short like. But she was proud ov him all the time, for there was a shake in her voice an' she filled his pipe for him, an' put her little hand in his.

So there was a great weddin' in the Rath whin Fiona wint to another Rath King ridin' a white horse, an' he half covered with silver an' gould.

Throosh an' Noreen were wed, too, with the King's own ring ov fairy gould.

An' ye wint very quiet like now to the Rath among the hills, whin the thorns blow white in May and the late primmeroses are yelly stars, ye might see the fairies sittin' round in the ring and little Throosh tellin' the story of how he beshted the King of the Loch.

But for the apple it wint from him next day. An' he has nivir seen Moira Dhuv since.

XII

THE STOPPING OF KILLEEN GORSE

A TINY cottage crouched on a bleak hillside ; above it, fenced in by stony banks, a great stretch of gorse, rising steeply, until the thick green was cut against the line of the sky. Here and there peeping out of it grey cairns of stones, marking deep caves and holes. An eerie, desolate spot, with no other house near it ; but, in its loneliness, one of the best fox covers of Cahervally. For thirty years it had answered to the calls upon it. Hounds had never dashed in from the upper side and spread out into the dimness below the thick gorse bushes without the whimper which sends a thrill through the field, and then the long, confirming note breaking out. Crash and echo along the hillside and clean green fields all round. Men rode their best horses at Killeen ; they sat waiting with tense faces, with hats crammed down and reins held short. Scent might be lacking, a hunt might be spoiled, but it was sure to begin.

Danny Halpin, a grey old man, held the covert-stopping as his pride and joy—there were deep holes

in the caves, there were cavities in the heaped-up rocks, and never one neglected. Let the night be what it might, blinding rain or whistling storm, the old man was out creeping and crawling and pushing until every corner was secure. The people in the village, a nest of cabins in the hollow, whispered strange stories of the gorse and its caves, but Danny knew no fear of it.

And now a new Master had taken the Cahervallys, Danny was all agog to show him the never-failing gorse. He came over in his motor—old Danny was a personage in his way—came with Derek Graves, the owner of the land, and Danny was not there to meet him. A woman, bent and grey, sat sobbing over the fire, and what had been Danny lay quiet for ever in an inner room.

“He here but yestherday,” the widow raised her tear-stained, lined old face. “But yestherday, all through the gorse, counting the pups I’d say; he had two lots this year. An’ full of Misther Burton here,” she said, looking with tear-dimmed eyes at the new Master. “Talkin’ ov him all day he was, how he’d show him the covert that niver was blank since Danny tuk to mindin’ it. ‘No one but meself,’ says he, ‘knows the nooks an’ the crannies in all thim caves,’ an’ now”—she pointed to the dim outline of a waxen face lying in the small room off the kitchen. “Would ye not see him, sir?” she said, simply. “He makes the gran’ corpse entirely.”

The Englishman backed hastily to the door, despite Graves’s efforts to keep him back. Incident-

ally, he trod upon a duck and was received on the horns of an aggrieved goat ; but he had no desire to go into the room where the tall candles flared yellow in the damp stuffiness.

Mrs. Halpin was too wise to be offended. " Ye can come back, sir," she said, " if ye're not wishful to see Danny. There's some fears death. He was tuk sudden, but, praises be, there was time to get the priest to him, an' but for the covert beyant he wint peaceful. He wandthered at the lasht. ' The foxes,' he sayd, ' the dust fay here—Tom'll never come down—I must sthop—I musht,' an' thim were the lasht wurruds ivir we heard from him." The old woman fell to sobbing softly again.

A couple of neighbours and a tall, lanky boy with a weak chin gave her the comfort of their kind.

" Ye'll not be long afther him, Mrs. Halpin, me dear—whisht now—don't be frettin'. Sure, you're as old as himself, Aunt. Ye might be with him in a week."

Henry Burton stroked his clean-shaven upper lip in wrapt wonder. This was a new world—these people a new race, to him.

" An' who will have it now, sir ? Ould as I am, I'd do it, but me leg is lame on me. I could not climb among the caves within."

Mrs. Halpin was very poor. It was hard to take the revenue which had meant so much to them away. Derek Graves, speaking to the lanky youth, gave him the covert-keeping, but half the amounts paid were to go to his aunt for her lifetime.

"Tom'll never do it." The old widow shook her white head. "He'll niver face out the wild nights from up the village, an' he might be afeared too, for there's queer stories of the place above. But he musht thry—he musht thry." She turned almost fiercely upon her nephew. "See ye does it," she burst out, "or Himself'll come to watch ye. He showed ye the holes and the nooks. See ye comes to thim."

—"God save us," said Tom, crossing himself.

They walked out into the clear softness of the autumn day. The dense covert rose above them, lonely and desolate; the jutting rocks nosing from the green gorse until the fence cut across the skyline. Until the smoke of the village rose, down in the sheltered hollow, there was no other house of any kind.

"It looks a fine country about." The new Master was taking keen note of it.

"The finest—and this is our best gorse. Always full of foxes. It was the old fellow's pride. He was a feature of the Hunt, so to speak; we kept him going a bit. I think he would have cried if his covert had ever been drawn blank. 'I have them—I have the foxes.' He would be out here, wild with excitement, chatting. 'They was niver missin', Misther Graves, was they? I fed them lasht night.' We've come to other places after bad nights, and known the men had not come out until the morning and stopped their foxes in. Danny was a certainty."

From below came the sobbing voice of the old

woman, out at her door. "An' see ye does it, Tōm. See ye does it, to kape Danny's memory green. For his heart was in the place. His last wurruds was for it."

They cubbed at Killeen, to find two litters there and kill a fat cub which did not know how to run. He died, but hounds were put in again, and an old fox, slipping across the valley, gave their new man a sample of what the country could be—blind now, a lacing tangle of bramble vines, and high, coarse grasses hiding the ditches. Still, there was springy green turf to gallop over; pasture and banks stretching to Cara Hills, six miles away in front. "Glorious," muttered Burton, scrambling across a high bank and settling himself down to ride as the old fox got to ground.

Mrs. Halpin, tottering on her stick, was on the road as they passed homewards. "Danny would have had the hole sthopped," she said, contemptuously. "I heard ye had earthed him beyant in the forth. I told Tom the hole was there. God's blessin' on yer honour and send the covert niver blank before ye"—this to Burton, who slipped something into her lean, wrinkled hand.

"May ye be huntin' foxes soon in Heavin above," she added, catching sight of the gleam of gold.

"Thank you," said Burton dryly.

Graves stopped to speak to her. "I am but lonesome, Misther Graves," she said gently. "We was together for forty year and I cannot but think now,

whin I sees the Hunt, that Danny is above, watchin', watchin', as he'd always be. I turns me head thinkin' I'll see him comin' down the hillside, clinkin' the find money, tellin' me of the pups an' the ould wans within. 'Two out ov it, Mary,' he'd cry. 'Huntin' thim round for half-an-hour, but they'll get no hole to get in with Danny Halpin here. He'll turn in his grave, yer honour, if Tom neglects it.'

November is generally a month of soft winds and grey, lowering skies, but this year it came with a screeching of north-west gales and showers of bitter, half-melted snow. Winter was upon Cahervally as they commenced hunting. Steel grey clouds stormed sullenly overhead; the hills were white and the cold intense. They had met once near the town, and might have had a good day, scent, curiously enough, being good on the cold, drenched ground, but foxes were scarce—a bitter, snowy night had meant a morning stop in more cases than one. The next meet was at Dura, Killeen the third draw. Everyone kept their best horses for the meet at the little village. The lucky covert would show their new Master Cahervally country at its best. He would look askance at wire over there; near the town it was ever plentiful. They wanted him to love the place as much as they did, and Killeen would teach him, too. If only the weather would change. But the weather's ill-humour was unchecked. It held during the day and at five o'clock a veritable blizzard swept upon the night, great

clouds pouring out fierce storms of hail, changing later to stinging, half-melted snow. A north wind screamed in icy rage, tearing the last leaves from the bending boughs, driving little piles of hail and snow against banks and into corners.

Crouched in her lonely house, Mrs. Halpin would have no company; the old woman heard the storm go raving up against the hillside, heard the rattle of the pitiless hail and the weep of the snow and rain. And, next day, they drew Killeen. Old Danny's covert must answer to the first test of its thirty-first year. Danny would have been out long ago. She used to wait for him at the door on dark nights and evenings and see his lantern flicker here and there as he climbed up the crags and rocks; then watch it as the point of yellow light came steadily down the hill. Tom had not called in. As the storm grew in violence instead of abating, the widow opened her door. It was sheltered from the wind, but she could see the white storms racing by. Tom, the tall nephew, would never come from the village—the holes would be unstopped until morning, when no fox would be above ground—Danny's covert—would she hear for the first time the sad wail of the "Come away"—hear no crash of tongues above her? Then something showed in her gloom, a pin point of yellow light, moving irregularly, up among the rocks.

"Tom's come," she said, in sheer amazement, "or is it a fairy light above?" A flash of lightning rent the inky blackness, drowning the point of light,

but it showed a dark figure scrambling on the rocks where the light had been.

"Praises be," said the old woman contentedly. "Tom is up there—an' alone. 'Tis the brave boy he is, afther all—an' Danny may resht in peace."

She stood long at her door to show its square of yellow light. She put the kettle on and buttered bread, until at last she thought she saw the form of the earth-stopper and the gleam of the lantern coming down. But Tom never came in. He must have hurried back to the warm shelter of the village by the shorter way.

There was no fortune in Linallen Wood or Cahercon Gorse, both were bleak and exposed, the storm lashing against them; snow lay in ridges on the fields, and both coverts were blank. The covert-keepers took so many oaths concerning the carefulness of their stopping the night before and the exact hours at which they had come out that Graves shrugged his shoulders.

"Not one of them stirred until this morning. After all, you couldn't expect them to," he said.

"And what of Killeen?" The Master pointed to the patch of green, dark against the snow-spotted hill.

"That—is never blank," said Graves firmly. "Has never been."

"But it will be to-day," said Burton grumpily.

"As Danny was not there to go out," said Graves, half to himself. He looked up at the nest of grave-

stones in the windswept churchyard; the Hunt had seen to the stone cross which marked old Danny's.

Tom, the young covert-keeper, stood on the hill, visibly ill at ease. He avoided the Master's eye. He looked strangely at the gorse, and his face was very white.

"Unstopped," said Graves to himself.

Hounds dashed in, as they knew something was there. A whimper rose almost before the gorse drowned them; a crashing chorus echoed from the rocks. It was not blank.

"There are so many holes in there," said Graves uneasily. "The caverns are huge. If Tom scamped his work last night——"

He did not appear to have done so. An old fox stayed in covert until it was too hot to hold him, then slipped out over the valley—a big red fellow, going resolutely.

"Time—steady!" Burton's face aglow, his hand up for silence; then, when his fox was half a field away, a sharp twang on his horn and hounds tumbling to it. "Killeen has not failed us," he cried.

Out over the perfect country, wet to-day, taking a good horse to keep near hounds, the pack carrying ahead, hunting on steadily, with no semblance of a check. The fences were big and still blind, but the clever Irish horses flung them lightly behind.

It was not destined to be a great point, for, having tried the old fort in the hollow and found it

stopped, their fox turned left, tried for the hills, and then, as if pressed, turned back towards Killeen. Hounds, which had been all together, strung out ; a bloodthirsty chorus rose and fell as heads up they fairly flew along. And on the hill young Tom Halpin watched, his face still white.

“ ‘Tis a fairy fox ; they will not kill him. It is not right,” he whispered ; “ an’ begonnes, there he is—there he is—a real one too.”

Four fields from Killeen a brave fox turned with bared teeth to meet a flurry and smother of death. The two men there flung themselves from their smoking, panting horses and talked breathlessly of their gallop.

Killeen, which had never failed them, frowned above them. “ If Tom stopped in last night’s weather, Tom was a second Danny. Killeen would hold to its reputation for another lifetime.”

Their shortest way was over the hill, and Graves, whose country it was, rode over to Tom to pay and praise him. Old Mrs. Halpin had just struggled up the hill. She stood, tears in her dim old eyes, looking at the hounds. If only Danny were here—Lenane had failed, Caheran had failed, Killeen had given them a hunt—how Danny would have chuckled !

Tom shrank away, his head bent, from the proffered money.

“ Give it all to me A’nt,” he said, gruffly. “ She done it.”

“ Done what ? ” said Graves. “ Come, it’s not

every man would have come out last night in that storm."

"An' I did not, sir," burst out Tom. "God's thruth is besht. I was afeard of the storum an' the lonesomeness up here; they do say there's ghosties, an' Mike, that's me brother, would not come, so I sthayed at home. An' this morning whin I ran up at light to do what I could, ivery hole was closed. I come out—and ran home."

"But, Tom, I saw ye at it," said the old woman. "I saw ye—lasht night—from me dour below."

"Ye—saw—me—Ye did not do it, A'nt?" Tom swung round, grey fear in his face.

"I——" She touched her stick. "If 'twas Ireland for me, could I climb the rocks inside?"

The wind swept moaning across the hill, fresh promise of storm in its sobbing breath. They stood, the English Master close to them, staring blankly at Killeen.

"Then—who," said Graves—"who in the name of fortune stopped the gorse—or is it stopped at all?"

"Ye can go round it, sir; there is a stone in ivery hole," whispered Tom. "Danny's stones with the black crosses on thim, so that he'd know aisy which to take away."

"An'—'twas Danny did it," said the old wife, very quietly. "He cud not rest with the covert unsthopped. Ye brought me man from his rest, Tom Halpin, to do yer work. Ye see—what ye have done."

“ God help an’ save me,” muttered Tom ; “ but if the say itself is breakin’ here over the covert, I’ll come out to it agin—Mike with me.”

Harry Burton rode away, thoughtfully.

So it came to pass that the sovereign for a first find went for masses for old Danny’s soul. And to this day no man knows who or what rolled up the stones in the raving storm. It had been done—that was all. The village people and Mrs. Halpin made no secret of their quaint certainty that it was Danny’s work.

With fear in his heart, be the night what it may, Tom Halpin will never have the disturbing of a spirit of his soul again ; but the people tell you still that when Tom is there on dark nights a pin point of light follows his powerful lantern, and that when he is finished on dark nights one speck moves away from the path to the village and down to the cabin on the slope.

Be all this mere tales or imagination, it is certain that one night Killeen Gorse was stopped, and no man can ever be found to say who did it.

XIII

A TRAFFIC IN FOXES

“**T**HERE should have been more,” said Nat discontentedly, as he looked at the heap of rabbits laid soft and plaintive in death, ready for packing.

“The dogs,” said James, his henchman, darkly, “killed an’ ate maybe up to six, as they hev last time. An’ we’re but twelve short from the last complement. But sure, yer honour will have the dogs, though they’re never plazed wid ye, no mather what fine fox yerself and Dan has in for them.”

Mr. Knox bit his thin lips and looked blank. He had deemed this last piece of information a secret between his conscience and the poacher, Dan Kennedy.

Cahergreen Village, a nest of dilapidated houses, hangs on the steep of the cliffs on the South Coast of Ireland; a heather-clad mountain nosing up at the back, and the little group of creeper-clad cottages straggling out until they overhang the calm sea in the harbour. Cahergreen House stands away a little to the right, where the land thrusts an arm

out into the bay. Outside the headland breakers roar and spume, and the passing liners steam over high rollers ; but, locked in by jutting headlands, a mere echo of troubled seas is all that reaches the wooded shores of Cahergreen. Every ray of sunlight seemed to strike the crouching nest of houses ; fuchsias bloomed wild in the straggling hedges, flowers flourished with weed-like profusion, though the soft, salt-laden breeze blew fresh across the sea. Yet the Master of Cahergreen stood, frowning and discontented, pulling at his long upper lip, and looking furtively at his gamekeeper over the heap of limp, blood-dabbled fur. Knox was a tall, thin man, with long arms and nervous, grasping fingers, his whole face trained to an expression of goodwill, which sat uneasily upon its harsh features. Nat Knox possessed a naturally mean nature, which he tried to veil by appearing to be a sportsman ; it was his fixed hobby. His coverts always held when the Muskeen Hounds drew them, and if the foxes ran blindly, Nat could "never understand it." No magistrate on the Bench was harder on poachers, and once, when James Dayly was found with a trapped fox, Nat Knox spent three days groaning over the horror of the offence. But below all this lay the stratum which made Nat so unhappy—a wild desire for making money. Rabbits paid, and foxes did not ; hence the bewildered vulpines who awaited the sceptical M.F.H. when he drew the woods. There were horses in the stable, but they were kept to sell, not to ride, and Grania, his

daughter, often went horseless for two months, while big sleek hunters were exercised in the little park.

Nat reared chickens, he sold eggs, his pockets clinked to an assortment of keys. He grudged the waves and the skies and the wind because they could not be caught and sold for unneeded pence.

"We must, whatever happens, keep popular with the Hunt," snapped out Nat; and at that moment Grania came out from a creeper-grown side door. A dark, pretty girl, her cheeks kissed to a peach's warmth by sun and scent-laden wind, her movements those of a girl who could ride and row and swim the bay if she was allowed to. Nat eyed her sourly. Grania was not behaving well. Sir Antony Westropp had taken to paying her attention, and had already hinted that dowry was no object, but—Miss Knox slipped aside from the elderly widower lover who would plant her for life in an atmosphere of settled comfort, and favoured a graceless, penniless soldier who had come to Cahergreen on a friend's yacht and returned in the winter to ride recklessly with the Muskeens; scaling mountains, splashing through bogs, facing towering heather-darned banks, their outlines smothered in gorse and fern. The Muskeens hunt the worst country in the world, yet Neil Cosgrave—who, as all penniless soldiers can, kept several horses—appeared to be contented. If sport was bad, it was a very easy country to get lost in. Brown bogs and stony hills are all alike,

Nat Knox spoke plainly, forbidding all hope. Youth took him cunningly. If it was only friendship, it was better than nothing. Yet Grania's mouth drooped as she came hatless into the warm spring day. They had waited patiently for a year and were no nearer happiness. Her father was as obdurate as ever. He scoffed at the idea of allowing Grania to take her mother's fortune and be happy. "There's Dene Hall waiting for you," he said crossly, in answer to Grania's last appeal. "I—can't allow you one penny."

"Grania!" he snarled out now.

She stopped to listen, her eyes dark with trouble.

"Antony's coming to lunch," he growled, as he pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket. "Biddy can have three eggs, two for a sweet and one for tea-cakes. He'll be here for the afternoon. You could row him up to the point, eh?"

Grania took the keys, dolefully. She hated old Sir Antony now that he pestered her as a lover. The prospect of a row across the smooth green harbour was not alluring; the memory of other hours spent there made it bitterer. She stood with downcast head, fingering the steel keys.

"And look ye, Grania," Nat turned to her as his gamekeeper commenced to carry off the rabbits. "It's time you made up your mind to be sensible. There's everything in the world waiting for you—motors, horses, a fine house, and the chance of pleasing your father."

Grania's head sank lower. A dumb horror of nervousness gripped her, making her afraid of the soft spring morning. She knew how weak she was—how, if urged and pushed, with no one to help her, she would find herself some day in the small stone church, answering pitiful "I wills" to Mr. Hannan until she rose up "My Lady."

She clutched the keys, forgot all about the cakes and sweet, and ran, tears in her pretty eyes, to the village post-office, where she despatched an urgent telegram to Dublin, a message which sent young Neil Cosgrave to his Colonel praying for leave.

Her father went the other way, along the cliffs, where the land sloped heather-clad to the sea, lying cold and still under the shadow, then up and on to where cliffs were honeycombed with little caves, and a whiff of fox drove strongly to his nostrils.

It was April, and already the vixens bred in the holes in the rocks. Nat stood thinking, greedily, quietly eyeing those cave mouths. Money, the god he worshipped, had led his feet into dark paths. A year ago he had seen a certain advertisement in a daily paper, and remembered the caves upon the hill. Dan Kennedy, the dirty youth who smuggled in the bagmen on hunting mornings, possessed the rare gift of silence—if he was paid for it; his old muzzle-loader had sent death into many a varmint who sought out Cahergreen as a home. Here was money for the asking. The cubs were stolen at night, and in the dark were driven to Moyarta

Junction to go eastwards to a big and well-known Hunt.

"They're no use here. No use," murmured Nat, but he knew what would happen if he were found out, and he said it uneasily. These were exceptionally early cubs this year; he had already accepted an offer for a batch from a Master who hoped the very young foxes would learn to know his country if he took them as babies, and two batches would be fit in May. His keeper, Dan, a narrow-faced, cunning-eyed youth, came suddenly from one of the caves.

The Muskeens begin in October and they end in May; heather and peat and slate can be ridden over at any time. Nat Knox had received warning of a meet at his place on the following Friday, and he had to supply a bagman. An easy matter from this nest of foxes. He went home fairly well satisfied, to see the eggs taken in and the cows milked; but an uneasy foreboding lurked in the still spring evening. Even pound notes would not pay for his treachery if it leaked out. Also there was only bread-and-butter for tea, the cakes had not been ordered. Grania knew she must endure a scolding. But Neil Cosgrave got his leave and came flying to his tearful little love, to find her pacing up and down on a lonely rock-hemmed strip of sand, where they often met, but with her high hopes gone and tearfully depressed by want of hope.

Sir Antony's last visit and the forgotten cakes had been a bitter experience. Sir Antony, red-faced,

middle-aged and jolly, had spoken more plainly than usual. She could see that both he and her father looked on her girlish attachment as a mere passing folly, and were both pleasantly determined to see her Lady Westropp within the year. Antony had asked her to choose a motor, going into Cork with him to see some; he had consulted her as to new furniture; he spoke cheerily of a certain thoroughbred grey mare which would carry her nicely; the net of circumstance was closing round her, and she poured out her distress to her helpless lover, who could only offer to marry her and keep her in poverty.

"They'll make me—they'll make me—just to get away from them," she sobbed; truly Irish in her distress.

"Motors, new furniture, thoroughbreds," groaned Neil, "*vice* hack cars and Dublin lodgings. Grania, I don't know what to do. I've no money; at least, not enough."

"My mother's money would be ample for us," sniffed Grania. "Oh, Neil, of course I love a motor, and I adore Sheraton and hunting; but, oh, I'd rather have you."

They ended their complaints as lovers will, hot cheeks pressed close together as they sat in the shelter of the rocks. It was hard to preserve depression under the dappled sky, with the sea sparkling before them. The rising tide made little rushes at the rocks, snapping up piece after piece, lifting the dried weed and leaving it plump and fresh, eddying into tiny,

still pools ; the soft wind rustled through the coarse grass on the cliffs behind them. Hand-in-hand they sat, sad-eyed and despairing, as only youth despairs, with hope always smiling over the thorny fence.

Neil looked up at length—the tide would soon lick up the beach and they must get away. The points of the jutting headlands were cut too sharply for promise of fine weather. Two figures were clearly outlined, close to the black mouths of the caves. He pointed them out.

“ Father,” said Grania unhappily. “ Father and Dan Kennedy out by the fox caves. What are they doing there ? ”

“ Bagging a fox for Friday,” said Neil grimly. “ Didn’t you know they must do it. Your father wouldn’t let a fox live in his woods. There—watch ! ” Dan was stooping, evidently laying a snare.

“ But—are you sure ? We should never be forgiven,” said Grania, distressed. “ Father swears there are litters every year. He says he *never* shoots one.”

“ H’m,” said Neil. “ If I were certain it might help. Get in a little, Grania ; I’ll slip along the rocks and see what they’re up to.”

Grania whispered “ Good-bye.” She must get back. Neil swarmed along, swinging from point to point ; meanness did not count, if it meant securing any influence over Grania’s miserly father.

Three minutes saw him below the caves, where he lay listening to the voices just above him.

"You'll have that fellow to-night," said Nat's harsh voice.

"An' faith an' sure I will that same," returned Dan—"ready for the Hunt."

"And the others?" Nat's voice dropped.

"Them is but childer's work," came contemptuously from Dan. "I'll be away with the short hours—one of these mornings."

"How many brace last year?" asked Nat.

Neil wormed closer. He could not understand this.

"Tin, in all, but we biginned late lasht year."

"God help ye, Danny, if ye're cheating me," rasped out Nat suddenly. "The money coming to you yourself in postal orders an' all."

"God's thruth an' I'm not," came Dan's injured whine. "Let ye run out an' count thim same in the road if ye doubts me. An' I like a bird in the night stealin' away, and havin' to dip in old clothes an' all, on the way home lest the foxes'd be smhelt on me—an' chancin' meetin' any of the neighbours any time—I tell ye, Misther Knox, thee'd be nice talk if the huntsmin guessed."

Silence followed. Neil's heart thumped so that he thought they must hear it. Now, he knew what it meant. Nat Knox, landowner, covert-keeper, and member of the Muskeen Hunt, was actually selling foxes out of his own country.

"If ever a word of it's breathed," came Nat's voice in strident tones, "I'll—I'll—— Well, you'd never earn a penny again, Danny Kennedy."

"'Tis a most smhellsome way of makin' money, anyways," said Dan, sniffing. "An' not much I've from it. I often wishes I was away in Amerikee, so I does."

Neil's heart gave another thump as his thoughts flew fast. He knew where he could get a little ready money. Nat swore at Danny vigorously, and strode away alone, impressing it upon Dan that he was to be at the gap in the high wall to turn the fox if he tried to make back to the sea. There was silence by the caves, but the smell of strong tobacco drifted to the watcher. He raised himself very cautiously until his head was above the cliff. Dan Kennedy, cursing and smoking, was crouched by one of the caves, the wind stirring his ragged clothes so that patches of skin showed here and there—the poacher was very poor.

"I've caught you," said Neil Cosgrave quietly, swinging himself up on to the grass.

Dan started round with a snarling curse. In another moment he would have run away, but Neil caught him by his ragged jersey; feeling the thin, muscular arm underneath, and cried to him to stay. Before Danny could begin to protest, Neil spoke, quickly, fiercely, almost eloquently, pouring forth a scheme which caused Dan's wicked mouth to widen to a cunning grin, and Dan's quick brain to see the golden vista of the new world where no man would point at him as Dan the poacher, and he would have enough to eat. Rich men's pheasants and rabbits are legitimate spoil to Irishmen, but the

farmer's chickens and ducks are quite different matters, even if a man is hungry. Dan wavered, bid with his race's cunning for more money, and, being refused it, accepted pleasantly, sitting down to elaborate a scheme with far more detail than Neil would ever have put into it. When it was all settled, Neil looked back at Cahergreen Woods and at the low house nestling among them, and he laughed softly.

The Muskeen, despite hot sunshine, mustered in force next day. It was something to draw breakfast from old Nat Knox. Even if there were few chances of a genuine hunt, there was always a fox to hunt round and round the shady rides. Breakfast awaited them. Nat had groaned over the eggs and measured out cream, and seen a ham leave its briny tub, and produced home-made liqueurs which no one ever wanted twice. The bustle of the meet fluttered round the doorway. Horses stamped and swished off early flies, traps drove up; the hounds, wistful and sad-eyed, sat on the spring bulbs; there were other places to choose from, but they would have none of them. Grania, very pretty and young, in an ill-made blue habit, ran in and out with cakes and trays of glasses. Nat, in tweed coat and riding-breeches, was sportsman and genial host all over.

"The season's done with, but we'll get a fox here, I suppose," said Dick Graves, the young and fiery-tempered Master, as he prepared to swing his light

form on to a well-bred bay, short-backed and active; long horses soon tired over hill and bog.

"I've always got them," said Nat genially. A snob at heart, he was somewhat afraid of the future Lord Cahergreen.

"Well, we're short of 'em in the country," said Graves grumpily. "There ought to be dozens about; but when Hilyard tried the sea-caves last year he got no cubs." Nat Knox started; this was news to him. "I've heard a whisper of trapping and shooting"—the Master's grey eyes looked queerly at his host. "By gad, I wish I could find any fellow who spoils his own Hunt—I'd see to him."

A flush which might have passed for a blush warmed Nat's leathery cheeks. The Master's whip described a curve in the air, which set his roan dancing away from him, and he pulled it back, crossly.

"Oh, not true, I'm sure—not here," said Nat uneasily. "No one would."

"To send off foxes out of one's own country, to trap and shoot," said young Graves, as he jumped up, "is worse than murder. Co-op there—steady, my beauties." For the pack, leaving the spring bulbs, flung themselves upon him with yelps of joy, and he jogged off to the east plantation to draw.

Nat Knox watched them go with troubled eyes. A word of his sin would see him cut by everyone and his true character revealed. His own young horse pawed impatiently. Grania was just hurrying the old carriage mare in pursuit; but Nat had many things to lock up before he could ride down to watch

the poor, bewildered bagman being hustled to his death. He smiled as he noted Sir Antony pull up to wait for pretty Grania.

"*He'll* never ask me to put down a penny," said Nat complacently; "and I'll do on nothing when she's gone." His thin face grew soft and almost pleasant. There was money coming from the cubs—after all it was worth the risk!

Then through the silvery day came Nemesis, a slim young man in grey flannels, striding past across the trampled lawn. Nat jumped as he saw him.

"Good-morning," he said politely.

"Oh, mornin'," said Nat grumpily, wishing the boy anywhere else. He had not heard of his arrival.

"I've come to ask you again," said Cosgrave bluntly, "to give me Grania and not make her miserable."

"Can you keep her?" said Nat coldly.

"No; but you can help us," answered Neil, with quiet firmness.

"Help you!" Nat's temper gave way, and he spoke forcibly, leaving no loophole of hope. They could wait for his death if they chose, but alive he would do nothing. He also stated clearly what he thought of Neil for spoiling a girl's life.

"Then——" Neil hung his head. Nat jangled his keys. "Then—— Ah, they've found!" The uneven musical chorus came down the wind. "But not a fox," he added thoughtfully. "It's not your fox."

"Why?" shot out Nat. "What d'ye mean?"

"Because—well, I've got the bagman in Dan's cart on the road," went on Neil, still thoughtfully, "with all the cubs, and the drag is laid right up to it. They will be there in five minutes," he added. "Sorry about Grania, Mr. Knox. Good-bye. I'll just run over to see them come up with the cart."

Nat gasped. He caught at one of the pillars of the porch. "What d'ye mean?" he roared.

"I found the bagman—and the other," said Neil. "Dan is waiting and will clear himself. I—I don't expect the hunting-men will take it kindly. Dan's got the receipts and so on."

"Take it kindly!" A flood-tide of fear rushed black upon stricken Nat. Discovery—disgrace—his true character exposed! A man who sold foxes for a few pounds, who shot and trapped and then brought in bagmen—to his coverts! How they would stare and scorn him!

"You've got me; but get Dan away," he gasped; "get him away—the jennet can gallop. Let the bagman out. For God's sake, Cosgrave—for—Grania's sake."

But young Cosgrave merely took out a cigarette. "If—I were going to marry Grania—I might run," he said. "Listen! They've carried it to the larch wood. Dan lifted the drag there."

"The scoundrel!" blazed Nat. "Oh, marry Grania—I'll give her an allowance. Marry her—but run—and save me from this!"

"Your hand on that," cried Neil, and turning, ran. No horse could get through the thick woods;

he must trust to his feet, and he had not much time. Nat sped by his side, forgetting even cream and hams. They skimmed through lace of bramble and tangle of young growth, dashed under budding trees, Neil's face growing anxious. The "Yap-You-Yap" had broken out again.

Youth told; he forged ahead. Nat saw him vaulting the wooden gate just as the leading hound nosed out of the larch plantation, and then fly across to the road. Danny, growing visibly nervous, was waiting there.

"Ye're sorrowful late," he cried, as Neil dashed up.

"Shake out the bagman," gasped Neil, "and gallop away, Dan, gallop. It's all right."

"Begonnes ye ran it slhender," cried Dan, as he spilt a big dog fox upon the road. "'Twas fearsome I was gettin', I tell ye."

"Gallop off!" cried Neil. "Put those cubs back and come to me for your money. Hide from Mr. Knox."

"Arrah! an' maybe I won't," shrilled Dan, as he laid his stick upon the jennet's back with a mighty thump. "Will ye go, ye schamer? She will—praises be—she will. There's times she sthops," he added.

The jennet broke into a gallop, leaving an odorous trail; and Neil, bag in hand, stood gasping heavily. The bagman lopped the high bank and loped away towards the hills, stopping now and again to listen to the bloodthirsty chorus behind him; and Nat, torn and breathless, reached the road.

Silently Neil pointed to the rocking blue on the road, silently he sniffed, and pointed up the field, and, just as he remembered the small bag and thrust it inside his coat, the Hunt came upon them.

"Gad! Did ye see him, Cosgrave? Lord, what a reek of it—there are foxes enough here," cried the Master.

"Up the field, you say. Hoic, over there. Hoic. Ah, steady there, Merriman," for Merriman, Gravity, and Dairygirl flung themselves full-throated upon the trail of scent which lingered on the road, and the jennet, despite all Dan's thumps, was not round the corner. Besides, at any moment he might stop. Neil groaned and ran down the road to a high stick of timber, which he jumped over, pointing to the bagman's line.

"A brace. Get after those hounds, Jack," cried Graves; and Jack sent his grey cob in pursuit. Dan, turning and seeing it, hailed blows to which the others were as caresses upon the jennet's back.

"Bless me an' there are three," he shouted, a moment later, as Mustard, Daisy, and Patience, with ardour difficult to check, commenced to hunt Mr. Neil Cosgrave.

"Across the field," yelled Cosgrave desperately. "A big dog fox. Get off, you brutes. Get off."

"Ah, there it is," said Graves. "There it is," watching the body of the pack settle to it. "Send Jack on when he gets those three." He put his horse at the high timber and cleared it cleverly. "We may get to grass in time," he cried, full of the

optimism which kept the Muskeen Hunt going. The sun was hot, but the field settled down happily to scramble through heather and over bogs and mountains, and to jump treacherous narrow banks ; but it was fox-hunting and so sufficed.

But Grania, whipping the carriage mare, never saw that run or the bagman save his brush, eight miles away, in a rabbit-hole, for the girl was forcibly detained by a panting young man in grey, and the depths of the plot, which reduced her to helpless laughter, mixed with shame, revealed to her. It had only been a matter of extra money, a promise of a ticket to America, to the astute Dan, who was now loosing cubs on a lonely track near the cliffs and preparing to hide himself until nightfall.

By the time Neil and his *fiancée* got back to the house, Nat, resigned to the money he must part with, was striding furiously along the cliffs to find and take vengeance upon Dan Kennedy, who had betrayed him. "Small fear that old one ever claps an eye on me again," murmured Dan, as he chewed dry bread in a secure eyrie. "Not if I takes to wather from him," he added unvalorously, as he spied the long, lean figure flit up the cliffs. Foxes eyah—or money, this'll tache him, maybe."

It did, but it is well for Dan that the Atlantic rolls between betrayer and betrayed.

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XIV

A TRAVELLER FOR THE FIRM

MR. AMOS MOSENTHAL, of Mosenthal & Company, said something softly but emphatically, and hung up the receiver of the telephone. He turned to his brother, and partner, Mr. Samuel Mosenthal, and said it again.

"Harris has got scarlet fever!" he added.

"Gracious!" Mr. Samuel moved his splendidly dressed person uneasily. "Couldn't come down the telephone, could it?"

"It couldn't," said Mr. Amos savagely. "And Harris cannot come down the stairs or go to Paris. And Manson's leg is broken—and who is going to Paris with the diamonds?"

"We can't!" said Mr. Samuel.

"Unless"—his senior partner bit a penhandle—"you did it as a honeymoon, Sam."

"Paris in July!" almost shrieked Samuel—"with Helme Hall lent and ready! And you can't, Amos, because Lady Mary will be best bridesmaid. The Paris firm must wait."

Mr. Amos referred to a letter on the desk.

"They won't," he said. "We've put them off for a week. They've an order for these stones from an American and"—he poured over the cipher—"Gaillon tells us to be careful. He says there is a leakage from our firm. Harris was all but robbed last time. You remember his bag was snatched at Rouen, with some small things in it."

"The small things," said Samuel sourly, "were extremely valuable."

The heads of the big diamond firm looked worried. Their two trusted and experienced travellers were suddenly stricken down by illness. They placed no trust in registered parcels of valuable diamonds. The pink stones going across bore a fabulous value.

"There is Jones," said Mr. Amos at last.

Samuel remarked vigorously that Jones was a fool.

"He is a trustworthy fool," said his brother quietly. "Better that than a clever fool." And he struck his bell to summon Mr. Jones.

Archibald Jones was slim, slight, faintly grizzled about the temples—the meekest and mildest of little men. He had toiled contentedly for a mere living wage since kind Fate had given him a place with the big merchants and jewellers.

Day by day he came on his bus, blessing the new motors that now gave him ten extra minutes at home. His five-roomed red villa contented him. He took his weekly outing with mild joy—wheeling the baby in the pram when it was fine, and sitting indoors and reading *Tit-Bits* if it was wet. His life was a mere passing of hours and days; and he

raised sweet peas and mignonette in a pocket-handkerchief garden, and grew geraniums in a window conservatory.

A month before he had gone with a message to Mr. Amos's house and admired a zonal on the balcony; the butler had given him a cutting, which was coming into flower. Mr. Jones was dreaming of it when the bell rang summoning him to his employers' private room.

He went in with a bewildered air. His conversations with the heads of the firm were generally confined to: "Take this letter, Mr. Jones!" or "Mr. Jones, call Mr. Harris!"

"You sent for me, sir?" Jones had never dropped the boyish mark of respect for the heads of the house.

Samuel whispered to Amos: "He'll never do, Amos!" And Amos returned briefly: "He must!"

Jones stood slightly on one leg and wondered.

"Mr. Jones," said Amos smoothly, "do you think you could cease to be a—that is, do you think you could undertake a task needing skill and watchfulness?"

Mr. Jones blushed and said he could try. Visions of advancement flickered lightning-like before his eyes.

"Harris has got fever," growled Samuel half to himself, "and Manson's leg's broken. Dunne is also a fool."

Mr. Jones coughed softly.

"So you see," said Amos, "after all, it will probably merely be a quiet crossing to Paris. Now, Mr. Jones——"

Mr. Jones jumped.

"Sit down, Mr. Jones—smoke a cigarette, won't you? Pass him the cigarette box on the table, please, Amos."

Mr. Jones lighted an expensive Egyptian and sighed for the luxuries of the rich. Mr. Samuel explained rapidly: There were certain valuable diamonds to be delivered to their Paris customer immediately. An American millionaire awaited them to complete a necklace for his young wife. The diamonds were rose-tinted and of extreme value. They must be taken to Paris immediately—delivered without delay to Jules Leroux, who would await the arrival of the train at his office.

"Can you speak French?" snapped out Amos.

"I can understand it slightly, sir," said Jones modestly. "I could ask for bread-and-butter, for example—*tartines*—and shaving water—*l'eau*—and soap—*savon*—and chops—*côtelettes*—and a few useful things. There was a young French lady——" said Jones, blushing again.

Mr. Samuel cut him short. He lowered his big voice suddenly. In tense accents he told Jones that there might be danger.

"Things," whispered Samuel Mosenthal, "have been getting out. Manson was shadowed last journey and his bag ripped open. Of course he had nothing in it." Mr. Samuel sighed sharply and

looked fierce. "Harris lost a small package not so long ago. You can shoot—eh?"

"I have used an airgun—against sparrows," said Jones.

"Buy a revolver, then—and keep awake!" snarled Amos. "This is your chance, Jones, and it's an important one."

Some further instructions were hammered hard into Mr. Jones's brain. He was told not even to murmur of his destination, and that the rest of the day was his own. At nine next morning he would come unobtrusively to Mr. Samuel Mosenthal's house, at ten he would leave Charing Cross.

"And keep awake!" growled Mr. Samuel.

"I will do my very best, sir," said Jones quietly.

"And he will," said Amos—"that's the worst of fools. Keep awake, Jones!"

Mr. Jones tried to accept the advice as he walked into the outer office. He was not quite sure whether he was asleep. An hour ago he had dreamed of sweet peas and zonals, and now he was going alone on a mission of skill and of danger. He might be followed—drugged! Mr. Jones was a reader—he remembered sundry stories in magazines; and he shuddered. Absently he went for his coat, to be recalled by a sharp voice.

"I am going out, Mr. Levi," said Jones—"going out for the day. I have to purchase—er—matters for the firm." He had come back to his desk to put in a book of account and the senior clerk stepped back with a yell of anguish. "I beg

your pardon," said Jones meekly. "I thought the wrist was my own. I was just seeing——" Here he pinched his own wrist gently. "It's quite right," he said, smiling—"I am awake."

One of the clerks looked at him shrewdly and inquiringly, very inquiringly.

When Archibald Jones had replaced his office coat with his outdoor one, he walked out with steps that faltered slightly. The day was cold and bright. He took some money from his pocket and strolled absently westward. Presently, after a walk of quite an hour, he bought a white silk handkerchief and a cake of soap. Then he drank tea and ate a roll at a marble-topped table, and tried not to think that when next he ate luncheon he would have forty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds concealed on his person.

"Forty thousand pounds!" shivered Archibald Jones. "Forty thousand—— Five pence—thank you, miss."

After luncheon Mr. Jones wished that he had not taken his holiday. If he got home before six his wife would ask questions—and if he refused to answer them she might be disagreeable; so, after a great deal of thought, Mr. Jones took a bus to the Zoo and strolled to the monkey house, where he stayed some time.

"Getting used to rapidity of speech," he said gently to the keeper. "Going to France to-morrow, you see."

The keeper said "Yes" briefly and touched his

forehead. "Pore, mild clawss of chap too!" he said to the gorilla.

Going homeward, Mr. Jones passed a small gun-shop and started. He went in after some hesitation, asking mildly whether he could buy a revolver. A small but wicked-looking weapon was laid on the counter and Jones looked at the cartridges in their box.

"But—would they go through anything?" he inquired sceptically.

There was a board at the end of the shop with an old mattress behind it; a rough target was marked on its face. The proprietor promptly shot at the bull's-eye and missed it handsomely; but the bullet disappeared. He handed the weapon to Jones with a curt:

"You see wot it'll go through, sir. Let it off."

Jones took it up carefully. He looked with great trepidation along the little barrel and pressed the trigger.

"An' you didn't look at it neither!" said the shopman respectfully, looking with some surprise at a black dab in the centre of the red bull's-eye. "No idea you were a crack shot!"

"Six bullets, please," said Jones nervously, "in a separate box. Thank you—that is all. Oh, six will be quite enough. There would not be six men—would there? Good evening!"

He went back to Brixton with the revolver in his overcoat pocket. His wife prescribed a liver pill because he was looking "that peaked!" He had

to explain to her awkwardly—he was a bad liar—that he was going on a message for the firm next day—to the country.

Mrs. Jones immediately thought of a raised salary and the cottage of their dreams. She also considered that Mosenthal & Jones would look quite well on the firm's paper. She saw him off next morning at eight, having boiled eggs for him and made his coffee.

“He's a good little softy!” said Anna Jones as she went to dust her house.

At ten o'clock Mr. Jones, hurriedly seeking to avoid observation, walked into a first-class carriage at Charing Cross. He did not notice a dark man who had followed him to the ticket office and who now came to his carriage and looked for a place. He was followed by a second man—a round-faced little fellow with a big moustache. As he settled himself in his corner Jones heard scraps of conversation:

“It couldn't be—they couldn't!” “I tell you they have!” “A fool like that—— But the class of fool to go on through anything and never see——”

Archibald Jones, unfolding *Tit-Bits*, wondered who they were talking of. Both men got into his carriage. He had been careful to choose a full one, according to instructions. The dark man came to the door, looked in and found a place, moving bags with a callousness that appalled Mr. Jones.

“Not taken, sir, I think—thank you. Yes—

room here, Gray. Come on—only bags on the seats.”

Mr. Jones turned to the puzzle page. He became immersed in the difficulty of finding the name of a station to fit a pot-hat upside down, a line which might have been that of a telegraph or for clothes—or a mere rope—and a glimpse of the seacoast. His railway guide was opened; he poured over hats and lines and cliffs, and found nothing.

“Line under Hat Sea! Hat over Line Sea! Wire Hat View!” cooed Mr. Jones. “First prize, motor-car. I got within ten of winning the last. I could get the man to bring the car up once, just to give us prestige in the neighbourhood. Second prize, a diamond pin——”

Mr. Jones laid the guide down and grew cold. Already on this momentous journey he had forgotten all about the diamonds he was taking to Paris. He put his hand upon his little bag and shivered. Then he stared at his fellow passengers. They were all very ordinary men in ordinary clothes. “Most probably,” ruminated Jones, “they had not an idea of who he was, of where he came from, or that he travelled for any firm.” He looked again at his paper.

“Trying very hard for that prize myself,” said a pleasant voice. “Not a chance though! One of a piece of rock and some people beats me.”

“Folkestone,” said Mr. Jones gently; “but this is beyond my powers.”

The dark young man looking at it said it was also

beyond him. He explained to Mr. Jones that he thought the pot-hat might be a saucepan with the handle off and all Mr. Jones's previous ideas were upset.

"Or, if it's a pot—Hathersea," said the stranger. "Hat; air—airline; sea. There you are!"

Mr. Jones wrote it down. He produced a bundle of back numbers; he grew excited over the pictures. The white cliffs of Dover were close too soon. He put away the papers reluctantly and sat alone upon a deckchair, sadly lost without his wife.

Presently the dark, boyish-looking man stumbled over his toes and apologized.

"Oh, you!" he said. "Feeling bad? No? Good sailor? Have a drink, then?"

"I hate lemonade," said Mr. Jones mildly. "Lemonade and these waves—I think not."

"Have tea, then—I'm going to. I want to try to puzzle out that pair of pictures."

He sat by Mr. Jones, who was moved by the stranger's affability and believed him to be an officer in His Majesty's service. He said so blandly and was not contradicted.

"Observant fellow you are," said the dark youth. "Sure to win that prize! Yes. My name's Staunton—the Buffs—off on leave. And this is my brother officer, Captain Hill of the same regiment."

Two officers of the line were surely safe companions. Mr. Jones noticed that Captain Hill had one eyebrow higher than the other. As Mr. Jones

began to find out that even without lemonade the waves annoyed him, he grew more silent. He kept his bag at his feet and studied *Tit-Bits* very assiduously, though the pictures failed to interest him now.

"Calais," said the dark youth across a void in which nothing was still.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Jones greenly. "Anna chose fine days," he said resentfully. "We have been twice to Boolong, but she chose fine days to cross on—she is so reliable."

In the custom house Mr. Jones had to open his bag. It contained a change for the night and several ripe pears tucked in among handkerchiefs and a pair of socks. He declared and paid duty on twenty-five cigarettes, believing it would be impossible to procure anything like them in Paris. "Having been told by Mr. Mosenthal himself to spare no expense!" said Mr. Jones to himself.

The small revolver was in his overcoat pocket, where it was almost forgotten.

The dark young man had been close to Mr. Jones when he opened his little bag; when they got outside—quite by accident—he cannoned hard against the little man, stopped to apologize and looked astonished.

"Hello—you!" the dark young man said. "Going to the buffet? You know that eighth picture? The hat, I believe, is a lobster pot."

"Pot-lyne-sea—Lob-stroke-sea!" said Jones. "I think not." But still dreaming of the pictures he took coffee with the strangers and was not

surprised when he found himself in their carriage *en route* for Paris.

He made one or two timid inquiries as to the great city—supposed it was a flimsy French affair compared to London—and relapsed into silence. It was close to Paris that Captain Staunton took out a bottle of hot coffee. The evening was chill, a fragrant scent of coffee tempting ; little Jones took a cup gladly ; he spilt some as he lifted the cup to his lips.

“ The girl is very late, Anna,” he heard himself saying weakly—“ very ! ”

He blinked at a dirty ceiling ; he wondered why he could not move. There was a hideous taste in his mouth and his head ached horribly.

Presently he was aware that he lay upon his back on a narrow bedstead in a back room with a sloping ceiling. The return of consciousness came with pangs of misery. Befooled, drugged, robbed ! The diamonds gone ! He had betrayed his trust to his masters ! He had proved himself the fool Anna always called him.

“ She will never forget,” groaned Archibald Jones ; “ never ! ”

He wriggled a little ; he was not tightly bound. The atmosphere of the place was sickeningly stuffy. It was quiet ; there was no roar of London in his ears. Screwing round his aching head he saw his neat garments flung here and there upon the floor ; his boots cut to pieces near the window ; his bag,

with the lining trailing out. His clean collars, his nightshirt, and the ripe pears had been flung in a heap on the one table. A slow, faint smile crossed Mr. Jones's mouth.

"They haven't got 'em yet!" he said, and nearly fainted.

He was lying back inert when a key clicked in the lock. Cunning he had not deemed himself capable of made him keep his eyes closed; his colour was ghastly.

"Not a flicker," said the voice of the man who had called himself Staunton. "Not a flicker—the little ape!" He kicked at the bed angrily.

"Where are they?" said the other man.

"That," was the reply, "we shall know when he comes to. He won't forget. There's his own toy gun there if he does and my knife."

"And then?" Mr. Jones hoped his eyelids were not flickering.

"Then—the Seine is just at the end of the second roof! A chop or two will spoil his identity. Then Jones-Bury"—he said and laughed—"The *Tit-Bit*! He'll win his prize in the Morgue—the idiot!"

"Laughed," said Mr. Jones's inner consciousness angrily, "at such a subject!"

"That stuff lasts for twelve hours. We gave it to him at five, and he's a miserable specimen; about five this evening he will wake. No chance till then. Lord!"—Jones heard another laugh—"how easily we took the little fool out of the train, calling him our drunken friend! Eh, Antoine?"

So we will fetch Le Loup. It is as well to be ready. He will make this imbecile speak ! ”

Mr. Jones heard them going away. The door was shut and locked. He could hear their steps on a wooden stairway. He staggered to his feet, flung on his ripped, mal-treated garments. His boots were beyond wearing. Though sick and giddy, he went to the table and pocketed almost mechanically the pears and his little revolver.

The window was easy to manage. He lifted it and scrambled on to a steeply sloping old roof ; and even as he did so, wondering how he could escape, he heard the door in the room behind him opened.

“ They have given me no time ! ” said Jones to himself irritably. Someone yelled. Voices sounded in French quite beyond Mr. Jones’s comprehension, but he knew the language was bad and regretted his being the cause. He crouched close against the wall of the house, so that to find him heads must be put out of the window.

“ He is gone ! He can only be just outside. Hey, you Jones ! ” snarled the false captain.

“ *Ici*, ” said Mr. Jones gently. “ *Je suis ici, villains !* ”

“ Come back, fool, and we will treat with you ! Stay there and without fail shall we kill you ! ” cried his betrayer. “ There is no way off that roof. You are in a trap, helpless ! ”

Mr. Jones loaded his bulldog and crouched closer.

“ Give us the stones and you shall go——”

“*Certainemong nong!*” said Jones quickly.
 “And I am armed.”

“Oh, kill him, and have it over!” said a voice in French.

Mr. Jones’s spine crisped. He waited. So he was to die!

“A most awkward affair!” he said aloud.
 “And due to my own carelessness. Still, as I am here——” He waited quietly.

The voices came close to the window. Jones knew that a hand must appear before he could be killed; he watched for it. It came—a powerful, dirty hand, cuddled round a revolver. Snap! snap! the bulldog spoke twice, and the larger weapon clattered on to the roof to the accompaniment of a roar of anguish.

“I am really a very excellent shot,” murmured Jones to himself. And he wanted to wake up—badly. “I am obliged to do my employers’ work,” he said.

Two voices thundered threats, raging. Archibald Jones understood little of the rapid French they spoke.

“The little rat can shoot!” said one in English.

“Imbecile! *Scelerat* Jo-anes!” said the other.

Mr. Jones could not understand the words, but he knew the voices meant death. He crouched close, his finger on the trigger.

A hand appeared again, shooting out; and simultaneously a face, grim and set. A revolver

coughed. Something whizzed past Mr. Jones's arm and he felt a sear as of hot iron—then the damp warmth of blood.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Jones. "It is in earnest!" And the cheap bulldog barked. He heard a cry from the room—veiled curses—threats.

The head swayed forward slowly into view, the mouth growing slack, the eyes staring in curious surprise at nothing—a thin crimson stream oozing from behind one ear.

"I have killed a man! Oh, Heaven! I have killed a man!" whimpered Mr. Jones. "Sir, are you very much hurt? You brought it on yourself—*vraiment!* I am merely the firm's traveller." Two voices snarled mad, incoherent answers. "Don't blame me, sir!" said Jones to his quiet entrapper, the man who had called himself Staunton. "You must recognize that, in my position of trust——" The face recognized nothing.

It was silent on the roof and cold. Jones heard scrabbling sounds away to his right. "Be careful!" said Jones clearly. "*Avez* care, French robbers, for *je suis un* dead shot! *J'ai* hit the eye of a *vache*, an *homme vache* in a *fusil* shop—plumb! So be careful, *je vous impresse!*"

Then in the silence he began to crawl towards the gutter; thinking he might find someone to call to down below; he was working a laborious way when a trapdoor shot up and two faces peered into the gloom. One he had seen before; the other was merciless, bestial—framed by a week's growth

of stubble. Somehow the puny little Londoner knew that this was the face of the man who would have first tortured and then killed him. A blood-stained bandage was wrapped round one hand ; the other gripped a revolver.

"Softly!" said this man. "We will cripple him, but leave him alive—for a time."

"English dog, give up the stones and we will give you your life!" said the man who had been called Hill.

"*Nong!*" jerked out Mr. Jones. "*Nong!* Apaches!" Inwardly another voice said resignedly: "Now I shall certainly be killed. And the sweet-pea seeds were for exhibition!"

The eyes in the evil face saw him. With an oath, the man sprang—agile, sure-footed ; and his revolver spat twice.

"I have really no desire to hurt if you will go quietly," said Jones. "But——"

The cheap pistol coughed out the remaining bullets ; it could do no more.

The evil, hideous face came on. Mr. Jones dropped his weapon and caught frantically at the Frenchman's sleeve.

"It is over!" he said to himself.

But even as the hot breath fell on him and he saw closely the cruelty of the stubble-framed mouth, with its broken, blackened teeth, the fierce eyes fixed, the triumphant grin widened. Slowly, very slowly, the man crumpled to his knees ; he coughed quite gently but persistently—one hand tearing

at his side. Then the cough grew fainter, softer ; he pitched out and lay still.

“ The lungs ! ” said Jones. “ Man ! I warned you of the *vache’s* eye——”

“ You devil ! ” yelped a voice behind the trapdoor.

“ Oh, yes ; but as I explained——” began Jones.

“ Oh, you devil ! ” said the voice again, and hurried steps sounded descending.

“ It is very awkward, but this person also appears to be dead ! ” murmured Jones, touching the still form. “ He would interfere ! And I think I had better leave.”

Like a man in a dream he approached the trapdoor ; and, with a last apologetic look at the two quiet people lying in the dusk, he went down a dirty ladder to find a door leading on to a flight of stairs. Indescribable odours drifted up them : those of charcoal, cabbage soup, of humanity penned in close places ; but Jones met no one. In two minutes he was padding bootless along narrow ways, where houses jostled, blotting out the sky. The gleam of the river brought hope. Small and shabby, he escaped the notice of birds of prey, though at first he dreaded meeting the man called Hill, with new friends.

He was saved by the value of the booty—indiscriminate aid would have meant too great a sharing of plunder ; and his would-be robber had to go to find friends.

The streets widened ; he made timid inquiries for the way. Little Jones was very tired ; he felt

spasms of nausea. He hailed a taxi nervously, concealing his feet. The wide streets of golden Paris fled by him, and somewhere—two men lay dead!

“I shall wake!” murmured Archibald Jones.

The great jeweller, growing uneasy, still awaited the messenger. A dishevelled, hatless, bootless little man was ushered into the private office of Monsieur Jules Leroux.

“From Mr. Mosenthal,” said Jones precisely. “I have been waylaid by Apaches—by foolish men who did not understand the danger.”

“*Mais!*” said Leroux, open-eyed—“*Mais!* They have robbed you! Ah! the police!”

“Robbed me!” said Jones contemptuously. “Here, *mossoo*, are your stones!” He drew from his pocket five large pears, carefully hollowed out, cunningly glued together where they had been opened, and varnished over. “If you will sign the receipt——” said little Jones unevenly as he broke open the fruit. “I am not—very—well.”

The warm room spun and darkened. He woke to the raw taste of brandy and the horror of sickness. Recovering, he told his story simply, taking all blame.

“And it was so distressing, but necessary,” he said. “They would not take advice. Two—and now if there is a trial—a scandal——”

“*Au nom de Dieu!*” roared Leroux. “Do you say you—you have shot a man to save your jewels?”

“Two,” corrected Mr. Jones. “Both were quite

dead ; their eyes were open. And if they make it murder——” Leroux got some brandy hurriedly. He listened to fresh details. “ I could not help it ; as you have heard, they would interfere,” pleaded Jones.

Leroux drew little figures on his blotting pad ; he coughed softly. Then he suggested to Jones that the affair might never reach the ears of the world. The two quiet people might not be missed much in Paris.

“ In a nest of rats, rats die and are thrown out,” said Leroux. “ As you shot no one came. But—*nom de Dieu !*—you—you do not wish for publicity,” he went on, still studying his mild-visaged visitor. “ And you are sure of it all ? ”

Mr. Jones unclasped his right hand ; it held a small, cheap button. Very slowly he touched his left shoulder, where his coat was singed and damp.

“ It is blood ! ” said Leroux. “ It is astonishing ! And you would not wish for publicity, monsieur ? ”

“ Oh, *nong ! Nong !* ” breathed little Jones. “ The skill of the English shooter needs no advertisement. I”—he looked wistful—“ I was beginning to hope I had dreamt it ; but——” He moved his shoulder painfully.

“ Get back from Paris ! ” said Leroux. “ It is unhealthy for too brave a man. Get back now ! My man shall give you boots and see you off.”

The jeweller was not sure whether he had heard the story of a fool or a lunatic until, strolling into the Morgue, he saw two quiet men there—one shot

through the forehead and one missing two fingers. Yet there was no word of murder in the French papers.

A weary, travel-stained little man presented himself to Amos Mosenthal next morning and delivered his receipt.

"And all fair sailing? No thieves? It was all right, even for you, Jones?"

"It was right, but a little distressing," said Jones mildly—"the shooting."

"The what?" flashed Amos.

"With the diamonds upon me, sir, it was necessary," apologized Mr. Jones. "And they would die, sir. I warned them!"

Mr. Amos Mosenthal gasped, and then laughed as he heard a sketch of the affair.

"You dreamt it! Go home and sleep it off, Jones," he said contemptuously. "You dreamt it!"

"That," said Mr. Jones, "is what I am trying to believe; but"—he touched his shoulder—"but there is a bloodstain, and all my bullets are gone, sir."

"You!" said Amos Mosenthal. "You shot sparrows with them!"

He rang up Paris, however; and when later on Paris rang him up he wrote a cheque payable to Archibald Jones, and said several words that were not prayers.

Archibald Jones went home to Anna. He hid

the revolver—he called his wound a scratch ; and he tried to make it a dream.

“ The sweet peas should be good, my dear,” he said that evening.

“ But what I want to know,” said Anna Jones, “ is who tore your coat and why you bought silly French, long-toed boots ! ”

“ It was all part of a—er—misunderstanding, my dear,” said Jones mildly. “ My boots were stolen when I was——”

“ Asleep ? ” snapped Mrs. Jones.

“ Yes—asleep ! ” said little Jones firmly.

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XV

MR. JONES AND THE NOBILITY

MR. AMOS MOSENTHAL took up his speaking tube and looked down it ; then he laid it down.

“ Why,” he began quite wrathfully—“ why, Samuel, should both our men be again away when there is something important to do ? Why should it be Jones ? ”

“ He managed wonderfully last time,” said Mr. Samuel pleasantly.

“ Managed—to land himself upon a roof—to murder two men ! ”

Mr. Samuel laid a large, plump hand on the table.

“ He managed not to lose our stones ! ” he snapped emphatically. “ He was faithful. There’s a leakage of information out of this office, Amos. Jones says so. We know it. Harris was tracked on his last journey ; and, clever fellow as he is, he had his bag snatched with a necklace in it. We cannot disappoint Sir Henry. That blue diamond is not everyone’s stone, as you know. And he has been after it for months.”

"Can't see why he should not come here to see it!" growled Amos.

"He has explained." Samuel looked at the pages of a lengthy telegram. "His fiancée is at Critchley Court. He wants her to decide. Well! Send Mr. Jones here!" he sang down the tube.

Mr. Archibald Jones was sitting in the sunshine, waiting for some work he had sent for and dreaming of his flowers. Since, some three months before, he had been sent to Paris by the great diamond merchants and had carried through an important trust, his salary had been raised. And he was occasionally sent on journeys to shops in the country towns.

The increase of salary had made possible the erecting of a ready-made greenhouse in a corner of the back garden, where various geraniums and other plants strove manfully to preserve existence under the lash of varied advices from the gardening papers.

For a week they would wilt and languish without a breath of air, because Mr. Jones had read in *Planting* that draughts were injurious. Then, in a cold snap of wind and rain, their outraged leaves tossed between open sashes, because *The Planter* said air—above all things, air! But they lived and occasionally flowered, enduring overwatering and dry earth and patent foods and the too constant attention of Mr. Jones.

When the greenhouse arrived and Mr. Jones had seen it bolted together in an ecstasy, he talked of

putting a vine there; of growing cucumbers and melons and tomatoes, chrysanthemums, palms and ferns—all together. He thought a crop of melons would pay for the house, and was at present nursing two precious seedlings under broken tumblers, watching their pallid efforts for life without heat.

“I shall enter for a few shows,” thought little Mr. Jones happily. “There is nothing like glass! I trust Anna has opened the greenhouse windows to-day; washing hours make her dreadfully forgetful. I——”

“Mr. Jones,” said the junior clerk. “Mr. Mosenthal wants you.”

A dark man in a corner seat looked up quickly. His desk was close to the wall leading into the partners’ office. Grant wrote on, but with his head inclined to the wall. Mr. Jones went nervously.

“One never knows what they may want me to do!” he murmured to himself. “They know now how able I am, and I have no desire to be obliged again to be peremptory.” Here he shuddered at the memory of two quiet people lying out on the roof of an attic in Paris.

Mr. Samuel smiled at him. He remarked almost amiably that he had an important commission to be carried through.

“And, though you’re not—er—brilliant, there’s stuff in you, Jones!” he snapped out. “You can do as you are told.”

He unfolded his wishes. A certain Sir Henry Critchley had for some months been writing about

a great blue diamond, which the firm had purchased at Christie's. Sir Henry had missed the sale; he wanted the stone to hang as a pendant from a lesser circle of blue diamonds. He had offered a certain sum and his offer had been declined. He had thrown out hints of increasing it on his return. Now they had a long telegram from Sir Henry. He was at Critchley Hall for two days; he wished to see the stone; and he was sure he would purchase it. He had rung them up from Dover to explain that he could not get to London, and that his fiancée, Lady Evelyn Martin, would be at Critchley. The buying of the stone depended upon her. If they could send it down by special messenger he would decide at once.

Mr. Jones listened attentively. He watched the unlocking of a safe and a great blue stone being laid on the table, where it winked and scintillated in the sunshine.

"Is it quite wise, sir?" said Mr. Jones timidly. "It's so exceedingly valuable!"

Mr. Amos crushed his servitor promptly.

"No one will suspect us of sending you with it," he said sharply. "And I don't believe in detectives. Sir Henry is a well-known collector, and this is our first deal with him. He owns the Maxwell beryl, the Sarascina black pearls, the Trent cat's-eye. He is too valuable to miss. You will start by the eighty-five from Euston, slipping off there quietly. You will, no doubt, be met at Henterley Station, and you will name a price and stick to it."

"The payment?" questioned Jones—"if he keeps the stone."

Here Mr. Amos muttered something about fools. Sir Henry Critchley's cheque, it appeared, was enough.

"But if he does not buy, bring back the stone immediately!" said Mr. Samuel. "Remember, Jones, we rely on you and trust you. You can take this day off," he added. "It's fine outside."

Mr. Jones went back to his desk and got his hat. Grant, the dark young fellow in the corner, was writing busily and smiling over his work.

"Enthusiasm! Sure to get on!" said Jones to himself.

Little Mr. Jones went out into the sunlit streets. He paused to look in at the windows of Mosenthals'—to peer proudly through the grille at the treasures on the velvet rests—here a string of pearls, lustrous, exquisite, flung carelessly close to a diamond pendant, which winked brazenly at the passers-by, further on, emeralds, turquoises, rubies.

Wealthy people passed in and out. One never knew what treasure the Mosenthals might have secured. It was a shop with background—with the upstairs, where the great unset stones waited for millionaire purchasers.

"Our firm!" said Mr. Jones as he wandered up to a florist's shop in Bond Street, where sheaves of roses and carnations glowed behind the glass, mixed with bowls of huge sweet peas. Mr. Jones thought he would now turn his attention to carnations. They were quite beautiful. "They do not

require heat," he remarked to himself ; and then he went home.

His Anna was ironing pocket-handkerchiefs and scolding her maid of all work—another product of the increased salary. Mr. Jones explained mildly that he was obliged to leave London next day to do an errand for the firm. When asked where to he said to Chester, hoping that devotion to his firm might excuse the lie. Then he went to the greenhouse, shut three windows and opened three others ; sympathized sadly with a maidenhair fern, which was dying in a gale of hot air, and slipped to his room.

He took out a cheap bulldog revolver, looking at it distastefully.

" But I ought not to blame the little weapon," said Mr. Jones. " It could not help the unerring finger that pressed its trigger."

Mr. Jones decided that he had better not take the pistol to an English mansion. And he went out to sow more seeds in the sweet-pea boxes.

Next morning he drove in a bus to the big house in Grosvenor Square, where Samuel Mosenthal lived, received a small and unostentatious-looking box, and took a taxi on to Euston.

His journey was uneventful. He eschewed conversations with strangers, and travelled third with the most blameless-looking people he could find. One of them carried a bunch of fine geraniums and mignonette, but Mr. Jones preserved regretful silence and asked no questions as to culture ; he remembered his first experience.

When the train slid into Henterley he got out quietly into the peace of a sunlit autumn day. A tall, fair man hurried to meet him.

"Are you the messenger from Mosenthals'? Yes? I've come myself to meet you. I've hired a car. Bustle along!"

Mr. Jones bustled. Sir Henry Critchley was well set up, rather youthful, and decidedly too well dressed. Mr. Jones noticed with distress what shocking care he had taken of his hands!

A jerky, noisy car throbbed and laboured along dusty roads until it battered up the avenue at Critchley Hall. Here Mr. Jones was surprised to see shuttered windows, drawn blinds—a general air of emptiness.

"Nothing ready here yet." Sir Henry leaped from the car. "House hardly open. This way. Hurry!"

Mr. Jones hurried—regretfully, because the roses growing against the terrace were still in bloom. He wondered if he might pick one. Sir Henry led him at a positive gallop into a narrow back room, a small office, with some papers and measurements on a desk.

"The stone!" said Sir Henry sharply.

Archibald Jones was exceedingly nervous—not for himself, but for that glorious brilliant thing he carried in his pocket. Very slowly he brought it out, undid the firm's sealing, laid it on the table. It shot out rays of blue and pink and white; it lay still, but almost baleful in its splendour.

“ Ah-h ! ” said Sir Henry. “ Ah-h-h ! ”

Mr. Jones stood respectfully by his diamond and wished the roses were not in sight.

“ A moment ! ” said Sir Henry, going into the next room.

“ He has gone to fetch the Lady Evelyn,” said Mr. Jones, who thought he would like to speak to an earl’s daughter.

Sir Henry returned alone. He lifted and fingered the stone eagerly, his fingers working a little.

“ How much ? ” he said at last.

Mr. Jones murmured “ Forty thousand ” pleasantly.

Sir Henry offered twenty-five—thirty—thirty-two. No more. He raged up and down the room, holding the stone lovingly.

Mr. Jones regretted he had no power to reduce the price. He was feeling more comfortable now and less nervous.

Someone knocked sharply at the door. An old lady in black looked in.

“ Like your luncheon, Sir,” she said, “ now or later ? Oh, the assistant from London ! Mr. Baker will come up this evening about the measurements you want.”

“ I’ll lunch later,” said Sir Henry very civilly.

Mr. Jones thought the housekeeper was too familiar in her manner. No doubt an old nurse. Sir Henry turned his back on Mr. Jones, but the little man was careful to watch the diamond. Then the baronet came to the table and handed the stone back.

"It's no use," he said impatiently. "I'll come to London. See Mosenthal! I can't spring to such a price and I can't lose it. You can catch the early train now. Come, bustle!"

Mr. Jones bustled—very sadly; for he thought he might have been offered refreshments. He sealed the blue diamond in the box and replaced it in his breast pocket; he scurried through the side door and got into the car.

Had he heard a conversation between Sir Henry and a friend of his he would have wondered greatly.

"Seems to me dangerous," said the friend.

Sir Henry laughed gaily.

"You'd have liked me to commit robbery, eh?" he said. "Why, it's all managed now, and he'll never be washed clear of blame. I'll travel up by the fast train, you see, quite boldly. He sealed up the box here. And I'll go straight to Mosenthals'. We should arrive together."

The instability of motor tires caused Mr. Jones to blight this plan and miss his train. Without thought of ill he wired to the firm in code, and got tea and buns; he was exceedingly hungry. He heard casually that he had done no harm, as the train which he ought to have caught only reached Euston ten minutes before the next. So he waited patiently. He weighed himself, got a piece of chocolate and bought some penny papers. And then he was annoyed to observe a crowd of excursionists pour into the station. They were young women, belonging to some society. They filled the third-class

carriages. Mr. Jones had been given first-class expenses. He decided to pay the difference. He was counting out silver to the collector when, to his surprise, Sir Henry Critchley ran down the platform and jumped into his carriage.

Mr. Jones was at the corridor side. He hesitated, feeling it might be presumptuous to travel with a baronet. Sir Henry said something to his porter thickly ; he was rather palpably drunk.

“ Shocking ! ” said Jones, stepping into the corridor.

The train slid away. The little city man stood looking at green fields and quiet silver streams ; at hedges touched already by autumn’s red fingers. He longed for one of these tiny houses, with gardens full of gay flowers in front of them.

“ The cats and the soot are so trying ! ” said Archibald Jones aloud.

Then he turned round. His penny papers were in the carriage he had left. He turned, and—his heart thumped sickeningly and seemed to stop.

Sir Henry, flushed and drunk, was bending over a small box laid on his knees ; from it streamed rays of pink and blue and whitey-green, flashes from the glorious eyes of the blue diamond.

Mr. Jones’s knees knocked together ; his throat grew dry. He had been robbed ! He had shut up an empty box. He had proved himself a worthless, untrustworthy fool ! The rise of salary, the little greenhouse, would be things of the past. The anguish that filled him was keen as death. He stood

in blank, dumb misery, watching the rays of his trust flash from the knee of the half-inebriated thief.

With a laugh Sir Henry put in the diamond and thrust the box into his breast pocket ; he yawned ; his head lolled forward as he dropped into a heavy, drunken sleep.

A coldly heavy voice rang in the little man's ears :

“ Bring the stone back, Jones. Remember, we trust you.”

Trusted him ! And he had been fooled by a trick. He could have sworn he had put in the diamond. Something was in, for the box was heavy.

Inspiration flashed down the rocking corridor. Sir Henry was not sober ; he would sleep soundly. It was up to Mosenthals' messenger to retrieve his blundering folly. Quite quietly his mind made up, but with icy fingers and beating heart, Jones walked back into the carriage, drew down the blinds on the corridor side and looked at the sleeping man.

“ For the firm ! ” said Mr. Jones plaintively, but very firmly, as he slipped deft fingers inside Sir Henry's coat.

A reek of whisky met him ; the sleeping man stirred and muttered. Still quietly, Jones opened the box and took out the diamond, replacing the box, but weighting it first with some pennies, with wool between them to prevent a rattle. Then, with the great blue stone once again in his charge, some fascination kept him staring at the flushed young

man. The train rushed Londonward swiftly. Little Jones slipped up the blinds and sat down to collect his papers.

"These are the small things that foolish people neglect," he observed aloud. "He'll sleep for half an hour yet. When did he do it, and what is in my box?" murmured Jones. "I could 'ave sworn——" Here he reproached himself bitterly for having dropped an "h," and lighted a cigarette at ten a penny.

He took out his own box, oblivious of his danger; he opened it quickly, meaning to lay the blue diamond back upon the firm's cotton wool.

"I—I shall get heart disease if this goes on," said Jones weakly.

For there, in its nest, lay the blue diamond! What had he done? He, not Sir Henry Critchley, was a thief. He, Archibald Jones, lawful husband to Anna, churchwarden, clerk to the Mosenthals, had robbed a slumbering baronet of another blue diamond. What more natural than a great collector's having blue diamonds—pink, green, purple? Why had he jumped to conclusions? Jones felt cold perspiration ooze clammily from his forehead; his hands shook; his heart beat in thumps. He was a thief, a busy-body, a fool—and above all, a criminal! For years he had smacked his lips in horror over the law reports; he had remarked to Anna, his spouse, that these men in the dock ought to be in asylums, since assuredly the sane would not commit crime; and now——

Sir Henry Critchley stretched himself as he began to wake.

Mr. Jones hid his face behind *Tit-Bits* and groaned. Was discovery upon him? The baronet rapped his breast pocket a little nervously, felt the box there, and lounged out of the carriage. It was a restaurant train. Sir Henry, now sober, asked his way to the luncheon car.

Archibald Jones was as a child lost in the wastes of terror; his mind turned to the superior intelligence of his employers. He must get to them and confess before he was arrested. He must return his charge, and then—he thought dreadingly of the bulldog revolver. “I shoot so well I should kill myself quite quickly,” said Mr. Jones with pitiful satisfaction.

The vacuum brakes gripped softly, checking the momentum of the train; they ran into Willesden. Escape was all the little man thought of; he tripped hurriedly on to the platform; he slipped and rushed through the crowd, seriously deranging several matrons with parcels; he thrust his ticket into the hands of an official, and his pallid glance towards the station policeman was piteous in its fear.

Willesden lies far away from the great firm of Mosenthal & Company, but a passing tram took Mr. Jones on his way. Wedged in a far corner of it, he watched for avenging taxis filled with police to come smoking in its wake.

The mockery of suburban gardens passed; they ran into busier streets. Mr. Jones spied a taxi

putting down a fare. He fell out of the tram at a gallop, oblivious of the crushed feet he left to ache ; he spurned the conductor to one side and leaped for the cab.

He overheard someone say casually : " Ivy wouldn't grow on that little bloke ! " And someone else who had a corn remarked bitterly that Jones looked like a murderer.

" Mosenthal & Co., Bond Street," yelled Mr. Jones to the driver ; " and five shillings for yourself if you make her hum."

The chauffeur, pulling in his clutch, suggested sarcastically that, with forty shillings or a month thrown in, he might make a good thing of it. He looked curiously at Mr. Jones's face.

" Is it a police job ? " he said, leaning back with the brake still on.

" It will be if you don't move ! " thundered Mr. Jones, regretting the bulldog and turning green with fear. " Oh, get on—please, man ! "

Police job ! He grew cold all over. London, his enemy, flitted by—policed, lawful, unforgiving to the offender. Every clumping constable was a menace ; every following taxi a pursuer. Mosenthal the mighty might beg him off, might plead for him.

It seemed hours before the shop behind the grille of iron was reached. Little Mr. Jones trembled too much to think ; he flung the man a sovereign and rushed through the shop and up the private staircase instead of going on to the side door. He

ran to the door of the Mosenthals' sanctuary and knocked.

"Come in!" said Mr. Samuel.

The diamond merchant was looking at a cable in his hands, looking with an expression of repressed fury. He positively jumped as Jones ran in.

"You need not tell me!" he thundered. "Of course, being you, it's over. Here, man—hold up!" For little Mr. Jones collapsed on to some specimen designs and sat there gasping.

As he gasped he talked in piteous jerks. Had he watched closely he would have seen the cloud clearing from Samuel Mosenthal's clever face. He would have seen a curious light come into his eyes.

"So—you robbed him!" said Samuel slowly. "Yes, the stone! Give it to me."

Mr. Jones pulled out the once-sealed box and laid it on the table. Mosenthal undid it to see the blue diamond flashing on its bed of cotton wool. Then, nigh to tears, little Jones pulled the second diamond from his pocket and put it by the other.

"If you could—plead for me, sir!" he muttered. "A first offence—in the firm's interests!"

"You do a great deal for the firm, Jones," said Mr. Samuel dryly—"a great deal. H'm! H'm!" He laid the stones together and he absolutely smiled. "A dreadful thing to rob a great collector!" he went on. "A dreadful thing to do! H'm! H'm!" He looked at the clock. "If I am not mistaken," he added, "Sir—er—Henry Critchley will be here in five minutes."

"If the new zonal had blown I could bear prison better," said Jones, and immediately realized that his speech was quite out of order. There was a heavy screen across the end of the room, covering a safe and some hooks where the partners hung their coats. Mr. Samuel pointed to it.

"I did it for the best, my lud," soliloquized Jones wearily; "quite on my own, your worship. No blame to Mosenthals'."

"Get behind that," said Mr. Samuel, "and wait there. There are more things in Heaven and earth, Jones, than you dream of."

The kindliness in Mr. Samuel's voice made little Jones sniff drearily. He got behind the screen, and, quite without thought, put on Mr. Amos's hat, which was two sizes too large for him, so as to be ready to go with the police. Also a pair of grey gloves; then he stood waiting.

The office boy announced Sir Henry Critchley. To Jones's surprise the baronet came in calmly, unruffled, with no word of complaint on his lips, and Mr. Samuel's greeting was of icy smoothness.

As through a dream Jones heard Sir Henry observe that he had seen the stone and had come to make a bargain.

"A little off," said Sir Henry lightly—"a leetle off the price. Your messenger, of course, is back."

"Yes," said Mr. Samuel quietly; "just returned."

"Then, if I might see the diamond—— You

are very trusting, Mr. Mosenthal, to send one man with this stone."

"We know our men," said Samuel—"especially this one."

Behind the screen Mr. Jones lifted Mr. Amos's hat solemnly.

"If I might see it, then," said Sir Henry at once. "Come, say thirty thousand and it's a deal. Just show it again, will you? A fine stone, Mosenthal, I missed it at Christie's."

Some portions of a top hat and half an eye came round the screen. Mr. Jones saw his employer take the box from a small safe and lay the great blue diamond on the table. There was no sun now, but the electric light was switched on and sent the rays of glory round the sombre office.

Sir Henry picked the stone up; he fingered it. He looked at it. He grew suddenly very white; he held the great jewel towards the light and sat down quite suddenly.

"Then—what—where?" he muttered, and was silent.

Across the stillness Mr. Amos's voice was as clear as the facets on the jewel.

"It was a pretty little plot, Mr. Henry Critchley!" he said coolly. "There is another diamond here, which is your property. I should like the name of the maker; it is well done; he knew the real blue stone well, evidently."

The second stone was laid on the table; with a click the light above them went off—and while one

still shone in the dimness the other was dull and lifeless.

“ A pretty plot ! ” said Mr. Amos savagely now. “ To ruin a poor clerk of mine and save yourself from all pursuit until this diamond was made ten of in Rotterdam ! Eh, Mr. Critchley ? ”

The man at the table looked exceedingly like—save that he breathed—the surprised man Jones had left on the roof in Paris. His jaw worked a little, but his white lips formed no words.

“ I got this letter this afternoon ”—Samuel Mosenthal picked up one—“ from your half-brother, Sir Henry ; but if the plot had worked I might have imagined it to have been delayed. You overlooked the possibility of my clerk proving himself a little too——” Mr. Samuel looked at the screen. “ Shall we call it too devoted for you ? ”

“ But—how—how ? ” muttered Critchley. “ Have you two blue diamonds ? I—the other——” Here he collapsed again. Surprise had undone him.

Mr. Samuel smiled softly.

“ My messenger,” he observed, “ is a man who does not stick at trifles. He missed his first train and travelled up with you. Foolishly you took that diamond out to look at it. My messenger, believing it to be his, helped himself as you slept. Sir Henry Critchley is a well-known man. We do not care to prosecute and give Sir Henry the pain of seeing your name in a fresh case. Another time don’t drink until you are out of the woods.”

Mr. Critchley recovered himself.

"But that nimby-pimby, namby—sallow little cockney!" he gasped.

"Mr. Jones is a very desperate person—in—er—disguise," said Mr. Samuel with a cough. "That he does not spend the night in a prison as a thief is due to his—er—cleverness. May I ask how you got into Critchley Hall?"

Henry Critchley grinned.

"A wire from Marseilles. 'Mr. Henry Critchley goes down to-morrow with an assistant to reconstruct electricity.' I am an electrical engineer by trade. I had only to keep your fool away from the servants. We waited until there was only Jones for you to send down to me."

"A very foolish error!" said Mr. Samuel. "A wise man walks in grooves, but you never know where stupidity's next step will go. We'll keep this replica for expenses. Now go!"

"That slack-jawed, undersized grub!" said Mr. Critchley—"with his eyes on the roses!"

He staggered out of the room cursing softly.

"Jones," said Mr. Samuel crisply, "come out!"

"All that abuse, sir?" said Mr. Jones nervously.

"Was, of course, merely natural reprisal," said Mr. Samuel unsteadily. "Er—quite so. And ignorance, Jones. Now directly," the merchant went on, "you put those stones on the table I knew that one was false, and I saw the whole clever plot. I happened to find out to-day that Sir Henry has a half-brother, extraordinarily like him—and a regular bad lot. We had never seen Sir Henry;

the whole preposterous thing ought to have come off."

"But to return here!" stammered Jones.

"Can't you see, you——" Mr. Samuel swallowed the word "fool" with extreme difficulty. "This Critchley changed the stones and saw you seal up the mock one—then was playing bluff, coming straight here before anyone was likely to have noticed the exchange, with eager offers to buy. He asks to see the diamond. I open the box—you would only just have come in. He cries out: 'But this is paste—a mock diamond! Where is the stone you sent down?' Arrest of humble Mr. Jones, who has done this thing. Noble wrath of Sir Henry Critchley, great collector of jewels. Denial of Mr. Jones—useless! He had sole charge of the blue diamond. He brought a mock one here, meaning to slip away to-night with his booty, trusting that the change might not be discovered. Sir Henry, a man above suspicion, thunders for the stone he came to buy. Mr. Jones is ruined."

"It—it was positively iniquitous!" stammered little Mr. Jones. "How—how did you reason it out, Mr. Samuel? How?"

"Some people's wits," said Mr. Samuel dryly, "are trained to go fast. They must be. I have to thank you, Jones, for saving us quite a large sum of money."

Mr. Jones nodded in silence.

"I understand you make a hobby of gardening," said Mr. Samuel. "My car will call for you on

Sunday to take you to see the conservatories at my place in Surrey."

Jones stammered his thanks and departed.

"A fool," said Mr. Samuel to himself, "is a very valuable asset at times. A wise man would have taken a wise course and made a muddle of it. But I would give a good deal to know," went on Mr. Samuel, "how things leak out in this office."

Over a sausage for his tea, Mr. Jones decided that he would not tell Anna. So much danger might upset her.

"She would not understand the strong motives that made me a thief," said Mr. Jones to himself as he sterilized potting earth with the water in the teakettle.

XVI

MR. JONES MEETS A DUCHESS

“ I HAVE two of the best detectives in London watching,” snarled Mr. Amos Mosenthal.
“ I would do it, Samuel ; and——”

“ They have discovered exactly nothing,” observed Mr. Samuel tolerantly. “ Someone finds out when we send off or receive parcels of jewels, Amos. Someone knows—just too accurately—and we are losing more than a little. Harris was robbed last time he was coming back from Munich with those rubies of the Von Hertlickers’. He carried them, according to my instructions given here, in a six-shilling novel pasted together. Yet, as he came along, that book was the thing to be snatched by an unsuspecting-looking traveller. The rubies”—Mr. Samuel snorted with wrath—“ had cost us fifteen thousand pounds. We may be rich, Amos ; but we must find out or we shall soon be poor.”

Mr. Amos lighted a stout cigar.

“ Ask Jones,” he said sarcastically—“ ask Jones. He’ll play detective for you, my friend.”

Mr. Samuel said emphatically that Mr. Jones was the only one who carried anything through.

"So far," he snapped, "he has escaped this gang of thieves. I would put him in a house surrounded by slugs if he did succeed in finding out for me."

Mr. Amos puffed a cloud of smoke and asked :

"Why slugs?"

"Because of his joy in destroying them," said Mr. Samuel. "He spends nearly every Sunday in my conservatories and carries away the tenderest plants, McClasky tells me, because he owns six feet of unheated glass."

The firm of Mosenthal & Company was sorely put out. Someone got hold of their plans; some gang was robbing them. Orders and plans given in their private office leaked out inexplicably. They trusted their men implicitly; they knew that both were honest. Yet it was growing serious. The dates of starting—the trains taken—seemed to leak out mysteriously.

"If you took to the parcel post——" said the younger brother, knowing he was applying flame to oil, for Mr. Samuel detested the medium of the post.

As Mr. Samuel ceased flaming a card was brought up to him; he fingered it curiously.

"The Duchess of Dackminster," he said. "She has no money to buy with. She has broken up and sold everything. What does she want? Show her Grace in," he said to the boy.

A young and pretty woman fussed nervously into the room, stroking her muff in palpable agitation.

"I came through the shop and just longed!" she gushed out in friendly tones as she shook hands. "Oh, Mr. Mosenthal, I want things!"

Mr. Samuel set a chair and smiled; the duchess had dined with him a week before. "What things?" he asked pleasantly.

The duchess said, "Diamond things!" with heavy emphasis. She began to explain feverishly. Mr. Mosenthal knew how poor they were—how they were just struggling. Well, there was quite—quite a chance of the duke getting an appointment as governor abroad. Oh! such a good appointment!

"But," the young duchess pulled a tail off her muff in her excitement. "Sir Frederick Grantham is a man who'd just give you nothin' if he thought you really wanted it; so Dicky and I have scraped and borrowed to make a show, and we're givin' a big dance at Dackminster Castle on the eighteenth. And I must have diamonds—I must! Those paste things never look the same."

Mr. Samuel began to think out the least offensive way of being firm with a lady who had eaten his food and danced with him. He could not give her credit.

"And I want to—hire—them," gulped the duchess. "So I came here. Just whatever you like to charge me—and send a man to mind 'em. Oh, dear Mr. Mosenthal, don't be a crab and say no! I must have a tiara and a necklace to go with my

black velvet gown. I coaxed that out of Fleurette. I must—and brooches.”

“ But,” said Mr. Amos, “ if the diamonds were stolen——”

“ You know that if they were we’d pay you somehow and sit down ruined,” said the duchess simply. “ I ought to have had money, you know, when Dicky married me. I’m doin’ a fight to make up for it now !” Here she looked pathetic.

Mr. Samuel believed her ; he knew it was foolish, but he did. He coughed and wished that Amos was not there.

“ You shall have your diamonds, duchess,” he said. “ And I’ll send a man to watch them, for lately we have suffered from a gang of thieves.”

“ Harris will be at Munich again,” snapped Mr. Amos ; “ but probably your Jones——”

“ I had thought of Jones,” said Mr. Samuel blandly. He spoke down the tube and sent to the office for Mr. Jones. “ You shall have your gewgaws,” he repeated.

Mr. Jones, who was working feverishly, with a corner of his mind in mourning for a delicate fern that had wilted and blackened in his greenhouse, looked up as the office boy called him.

“ And it’s a duchess, too ! Don’t forget to ‘ grace ’ her,” observed that youth impressively.

Mr. Jones thought it sounded familiar and re-proved Tom for levity. Then he patted his tie and walked into the partners’ sanctum.

He arrived just as the duchess, standing up ex-

citedly, swung the pulled-off fur tail with such vehemence that it leaped from her hand and struck Mr. Jones in the face. The nail scratched his eye rather painfully; but, not being sure it was not some form of ducal greeting, he endeavoured to look pleased.

"We shall send our Mr. Jones," said Mr. Samuel. "Pick up the tail, Jones, and wipe your eye; you're crying badly."

"The tail, your duchess," said Mr. Jones, with a bow, as he obscured his eye with a green pocket-handkerchief—the sort which looks like silk before it's washed.

The duchess was penitent—quite prettily so—for a second's space. Then Mr. Levi, entering noiselessly, placed a pile of cases on the table, and she forgot everything else. Mr. Samuel was giving her of his best. She had choice of three tiaras, delicate flashing masses of brilliants, lightly flung together in a glory of magnificence. Mr. Mosenthal strongly advised one that was a lacework of brilliancy; but the duchess chose a heavier ornament.

"That Sir Frederick will look at the size," she said. "A necklace—a pendant." Brooches and ornaments to flash on her black velvet gown. Like a child she hovered over the flashing things—lifting, exclaiming, admiring.

"My brother," said Mr. Amos, who looked painfully thoughtful, "ought to lend you the blue star to wear on your forehead—that would certainly clinch matters. . . . Have you any idea, duchess,

how many thousand pounds' worth you will put on for your dance? If they're stolen," continued Mr. Amos impressively, "I fear we——"

"Make it all out"—the duchess grew suddenly imperious—"legally; and you shall have a signed what-you-call-'em from the duke, makin' himself liable. We can always sell the last piece of the unentailed property if everything fails; the entailed part brings in nothin'," she added dolefully.

Mr. Samuel had it made out legally to satisfy his brother; the duchess went radiantly forth with her mind full of hope. Mr. Levi removed his cases and Mr. Jones stood waiting for his instructions. He was to take the diamonds to Dackminster, driven there in Mr. Samuel's car. He was to hand them over to her Grace and to receive them again from her directly the ball was over—and then return in the car. There would be no possible danger of theft in this case. Mr. Samuel would communicate all this to the duchess.

"And your Grace, Jones—not your Duchess!" suggested Mr. Amos, who had remained immersed in pungent silence.

"That, sir, was the tail," explained Jones, blushing—"the tail disturbing my intellect through my scraped eye, Mr. Amos."

Mr. Amos looked sceptical as he relit his cigar. Mr. Samuel inquired for the flowers.

"Wanting heat, Mr. Samuel," said Mr. Jones mournfully; he addressed the partners more familiarly since he had done important business

for them. "Wanting heat! Your gardener instructs me that paraffin is worse than nothing, and Mrs. Jones refuses to hear of the expense of a boiler."

"When you find out who is getting at our plans here I'll boil 'em for you myself at my own expense," said Mr. Samuel gloomily. "I'll give you a thing you can grow orchids in, Jones—all steam and stuffiness."

"Someone's to blame," said Jones sapiently. "Someone; and some day he'll just go too far and get trapped. They always do." He went out slowly.

"And you will entrust valuable jewels to that worthy idiot," exploded Mr. Amos, "who is dreaming of a hot-house now, instead of our work!"

Mr. Jones made a complete circuit of the office on his return to work, to the extreme annoyance of his fellow-clerks; in fact young Mr. Grant, who had the corner desk, asked him tartly if he was playing Puss in the Corner.

Mr. Jones returned to his desk and thought things out. He felt a faint draught down the back of his neck and decided he would be much more comfortable where Mr. Grant was. He said so at luncheon-time, stopping his junior as he rushed out. He knew he had only to ask for the change.

To his surprise Mr. Grant turned extremely pale and then asked Mr. Jones to luncheon. Not chops and porter, but grilled steak and a pint of good claret, followed by coffee and liqueurs. With this new

friendship between them, Grant begged to be left his own place. He had, it appeared, one eye that threatened to fail ; the light in this corner was just right for it.

“ When you get that heated house I’ll send you some plants,” said Grant affably. “ I’ve a cousin in the trade.”

They parted, Mr. Jones now quite determined not to do anything unkind ; and the little man bought a book on stove plants on his way home. With heat he might really make a fortune. As he turned the leaves eagerly he looked suddenly at Anna, his wife, who was darning his socks.

“ I have no recollection of telling him anything about the house,” he remarked.

Mrs. Jones said snappily :

“ Tell who about what house ? ”

“ The boiler house,” said Mr. Jones, “ that Mr. Samuel will put up for me. We shall have to pay the girl a little extra to bank the fire, my dear, on cold nights.”

Then Mr. Jones went on to speak of the duchess with so much enthusiasm that his wife, when he had finished, considered it necessary to quote peevishly, to hide the reverence she felt, that “ the rank is but the guinea’s stamp.” On hearing that Mr. Jones was at some unknown time to take some jewels to the duchess she first sniffed sharply and with delight ; and then, being a kindly woman at heart, said that Mr. Mosenthal knew where to look for manners, and that she was glad all her teaching

had not been wasted. And she hoped Archibald would see the whole house.

Dreaming of stove plants, Mr. Jones forgot to be nervous about his responsibility ; but he felt it deeply when Mr. Samuel's car drew up in Bond Street on the night of the eighteenth of February, and Mr. Levi solemnly handed over the cases containing jewels worth a fortune. Mr. Jones saw them all and signed a receipt. He got in next to Marks, the chauffeur, remarking that if they punctured he could get in and sit with his charges.

He chatted happily with Marks as the car purred through the still, soft evening ; they had forty miles to run. He made his usual inquiries as to the car's mechanism, and also, as usual, he was allowed to hold the wheel, with Marks's hands hovering over his. He drove her quite nicely and turned a corner with some skill. His subsequent shaving of an elderly female he put down to her deafness and stupidity. And he longed for every garden he passed when he gave up driving.

"The soot does interfere, Mr. Marks," he said plaintively. "If I could afford to get out a bit ! But the train fares——" He sighed, and dreamed of unearthing the mystery of the leakage in the office.

They hummed through the stately gates and drew up before a huge house flashing light from every window. An awning had been erected over the steps ; footmen were working busily ; the scent of entertainment was in the air. Mr. Jones was

ushered into a small room, where he sat and grew nervous; and he was glad he carried his bulldog revolver.

A discreet gentleman in black then brought a message from her Grace asking for the jewels, to which Mr. Jones replied firmly that he must deliver them into her Grace's own hands. Five minutes later a radiant girl in black velvet rushed into the room, followed by her maid.

The duchess nodded cheerily to Mr. Jones; she stood in the little room while her maid's deft fingers fastened the jewels in their places. Then Her Grace of Dackminster—transformed, magnificent—stood ready to go to dinner. She danced before a glass on the mantelshelf; she scintillated as the jewels caught the light. Yet she was a thoughtful duchess who summoned the butler herself and directed that Mr. Jones should be well fed.

"I had a room ready," she said, "but you're to go back in the morning. You'll see that Mr. Jones has his supper, Hill. And if you'd like to watch the dance, the conservatory is very comfortable, Mr. Jones."

Mr. Jones, relieved of his cases, ate his dinner happily. He enjoyed clear soup and oyster soufflé, and something strange done with chickens; he asked the name of this dish and decided that Anna, with her mincing machine, might really produce something quite the same with a rabbit. Mr. Jones also enjoyed a small bottle of champagne and a thimbleful of chartreuse. He talked pleasantly

to the footman, but was disappointed to find that he—Albert—did not care for flowers; in fact, seemed to look more for young women on fine days when he went out.

At ten the lilt of dance music stole across the air. Little Jones, piloted to the conservatory, looked into a scene of fairyland; the great ballroom glowed with amber-shaded lights; narcissi and daffodils were banked and massed all about the room, and the duchess, with Mosenthal's best diamonds blazing, stood receiving her guests.

"Tum-de-tum-tum!" hummed Mr. Jones. "It always did make me giddy—dancing."

Then he commenced to wander round the conservatory. It was full of azaleas in bloom, of bulbs, and masses of gay geraniums. It was well lighted, and Jones poked and smelt and touched, perfectly happy among the flowers. As the couples drifted out to talk he found himself overhearing scraps of conversation. Once the duchess's name caught his ear.

"Yes—people said they'd sold all the jewels; but she's wearing them. I don't expect, you know, that they'll be in England very long. They must have come in for money."

Mr. Jones peered round an azalea. He saw a long-nosed, distinguished-looking man, whom he recognized as Sir Frederick Grantham. His kindly little soul was filled with pleasure because all was going well. Mr. Samuel had told him why the jewels were being loaned. Later he saw Sir Frederick

taking the duchess to supper, and then he went to his own and enjoyed hot cutlets and more champagne, taken discreetly ; he was not greedy.

It was nearly two o'clock when Mr. Jones was roused from gentle slumber by a message from the butler. His chauffeur wished to see him at once. Remarking to himself that " your chauffeur " sounded well, Mr. Jones went to the hall to see Marks solemnly put out.

The car was hopeless—someone had got at her, twisted the carburettor, bored through the water-jacket, and done other damage ; and there was no possible chance of starting in the morning.

Mr. Jones was put out. He sent promptly for the duchess, who came, glittering and happy, to hear the story. The duchess was sorry, but did not see that it mattered a bit ; there was a room ready and they'd got another for the chauffeur—one in the yard. He could wire for a car in the morning. She went off shaking Mr. Mosenthal's tiara so that its rays flashed across the room.

" Someone did it ! " snapped Marks. " I was at my supper. Someone did—so they did—on puppose."

Archibald Jones returned to the conservatory. He stood lost in thought, and took no notice when one couple said he was the supper man, and another a detective. Mr. Jones was put out. There might be more in this than there appeared to be ; he patted the tips of his fingers together, and then he sat down to wait.

Presently, as the room emptied, a waiter hurried across from the supper room and came into it with some glasses on a tray ; a lady was feeling faint. Mr. Jones watched her partner fanning her, and then he looked at the waiter. The man reminded him of someone—of—— Mr. Jones started—the second man who had deceived him on his trip to Paris had one eyebrow higher than the other ! So had this waiter ! Of course it was only a mere coincidence ; but Mr. Jones wished the car was right. He pattered off down the conservatory to where a big, graceful palm stood in a large tub. He hovered round the palm for a few minutes, then he went back to his seat looking quite nervous.

At nearly four o'clock a radiant, diamond-crowned young woman roused him from a gentle sleep ; she was attended by her maid.

" I've come to give you the diamonds," she said. " Estelle, the cases ! And oh, Mr. Jones, I don't know how to thank that dear old Samuel, for it's all been a success, and we're off to the Colonies in two months. Just because I looked rich ! " Here the duchess absolutely pirouetted.

Mr. Jones made a mental note of the fact for the edification of Anna, his wife. The duchess had twirled round and kicked out gracefully. After this Anna might not object to going to see Parona at the Tivoli !

Mr. Jones took the jewels ; he put them carefully into their cases ; he thanked her Grace. He told her of his love for flowers. The duchess said that

he might like a few things to take away. "Azaleas or bulbs—or anything." She said she would send a man to show him his room. She actually shook Mr. Jones's hand as she danced off.

Mr. Jones went down to the conservatory, deserted now, and he spent some minutes looking carefully at the large palm; then, carrying his cases, he strolled back again to the door of the ballroom, where he met Albert.

"Looked for you all round," said Albert a little peevishly; "thought you'd slipped up to bed, sir."

Mr. Jones said very distinctly that he had been selecting a few plants kindly given to him by her Grace. The strange waiter was standing at the supper-room door. Then Mr. Jones went to his room.

"Great many strangers here to-night," he said to Albert.

"Blackett's doin' supper—nearly all waiters strange," yawned Albert.

Anna, who always feared breakdowns, had packed him a bag with things for the night. Mr. Jones found them in his little room, which was in the servants' quarters. His door had no key and no bolt to it. Looking carefully, Jones noted that the bolt catch was but newly taken away.

He walked round and round. He opened the window, because he practised hygiene; and then he disposed of all the cases under his mattress. He did not put on the night-shirt Anna had packed, but lay down fully clothed—and heard the clock strike four.

Mr. Jones did not mean to sleep ; he had, in fact, only just dozed when he felt a hand on his throat and smelt the sickly odour of chloroform. He opened his eyes to see himself surrounded by three men in the dress of waiters.

“ You give ’em up quick ! ” one said fiercely. “ Quick ! You sparrow ! ”

Mr. Jones blinked. The car breakdown had been no accident. He had been caught by the gang who robbed Mosenthal’s. Archibald Jones was ashamed because he had not been ready with his bulldog in his hands.

“ Tie him up,” another said, “ and gag him ! We’ll make him write ! ”

Mr. Jones was tied up deftly, his right hand left a little loose ; he looked intently at the three men and was interested to note that one had uneven eyebrows. He had no intention of writing anything, and his mild eyes said so so plainly that one of the men answered in words.

“ Oh, you won’t—won’t you ? ” he whispered. “ Won’t you, my beauty ? ”

A cold ring of metal was pressed against Mr. Jones’s forehead.

“ Now you write or off it goes,” whispered a merciless voice.

Little Jones played for time. The dance had lasted until late ; with dawn would come hope of rescue. He took the pencil and wrote rapidly.

“ Murder,” pencilled Archibald Jones, “ is requited by hanging, which is final and unpleasant.

Robbery is different. If you kill me"—he blinked gently—"remember that before I came up here I sent off a full description of the gentleman with the curious eyebrows, whom I have seen before."

The person referred to snatched at the paper, calling Mr. Jones "Murderer yourself!" in bitter tones and with a foreign accent. But he looked alarmed.

The three whispered together. One came forward and began to bend back Mr. Jones's thumb until the agony was excruciating. He signed with his free right hand for the pencil.

"Before God, we'll kill and maim you, and chance hanging for those shiners!" rasped one of the men in his ear.

Mr. Jones wrote "Wardrobe" in a die-away hand. That cheap painted piece of furniture was locked. It took a few minutes to pry it open silently, and then the thin door swung open—to reveal blank emptiness!

The three gathered round Jones—hawks hovering over a helpless pigeon! His endeavour to faint was frustrated by the thrust of a knife into the ball of his thumb; he took the pencil again.

"Much confused. Chest of drawers," wrote Mr. Jones feebly.

All the drawers were locked. The keys, Mr. Jones could have confided, were in the waterjug. One by one the locks parted—and there were no cases!

"Don't be hard on the blighter or he'll faint an'

cheat us," whispered a voice. "Now you Jones!"

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!* He's lyin' on dem!" rasped Antoine. "Pull him out! We are fools!"

Little Jones, glad that he was fully clothed, was hauled swiftly from his bed and flung upon the floor. With him, among the bedclothes, came his bulldog revolver. As they dumped him among his sheets and blankets, the discomfort of his couch became apparent—the cases humped up unevenly beneath the mattress.

Antoine pounced on one, growling over it. The cases shut with spring locks and Jones had the key. He bore pain badly—Anna, his wife, always said so—and the time he had played for was lost. Then, just as Antoine reft the flat necklace case forth, a door was opened and shut with a bang. In the tense silence they could hear the flopping noise of slippers.

"Anyone about?" asked a man's voice. "Anyone?"

He was answered by the flight of the three robbers down the passage, stuffing cases into their pockets as they slithered away. The sharp bark of a revolver was answered by another. Someone shouted and a whirring of alarms thrilled and jarred through the night. Antoine had found time as he fled to kick Jones brutally on the head. Through a mist of pain the little man saw the butler's astonished face looking down at him, heard foot-

steps and fresh voices, and the squeaks of frightened women.

“ They’ve got the cases ! ” faltered Jones. “ It was all planned ! ”

Here Mr. Jones sank into black oblivion. When he came to himself he was in a beautifully furnished room ; lying on a sofa drawn close to a blazing fire—several people fussing about him with brandy and salts and soda water. Someone cried : “ No brandy ! ” Mr. Jones sat up, supported by the butler, and apologized for his weakness.

The crowd melted away. As he gathered his scattered senses he was aware of the duke, partly dressed, bending over him, and of the young duchess, wrapped in something soft and pink and silky, weeping bitterly as she held out a bottle of salts.

Mr. Jones noted, for Anna’s edification, that duchesses did not go to sleep with several leaden curlpins screwed into their hair, and with the remainder tied behind in a pigtail ; but let that adornment fall loosely and untidily.

He was absolutely shocked at causing so much trouble in a ducal house, and he said so twice ; then he told the whole story.

The duke called him “ Poor chap ! Brave chap ! ” gloomily ; and the duchess wept on, sobbing out that it was “ Awful ! Awful ! ”

“ So very sorry, your strawberry ! ” murmured Jones, whose head was swimming—“ that is, your duchess ! I did my best.”

“ He—di-di—did his best ! ” sobbed the duchess.

"I can't help it, Dicky—it's thousands and thousands; and the last bit of place will have to go—all for my si-silly plan! We're ruined, Dicky!"

And the duchess ran to weep on the duke's shoulder, who held her closely and muttered in awkward tones:

"Oh, buck up, Ciskins, old girl! I'm not blaming you."

The duchess raised her head to look with red-rimmed eyes at little Jones. "You fought! You're hurt. But I ought to have looked at your bolt—I ought to have!" Here she choked. "We're only just ruined!" she said, returning to the duke's shoulder, with a flop of despair. The duke suggested hopeful pursuit, and the duchess stopped sobbing to say: "Pursue—your grandmother!" which Mr. Jones decided was not at all ducal.

"They had a car waiting," wailed the duchess. "I heard it drive off. They all separate and disguise, and do whatever thieves do while our men fetch the fools of police."

"The telephone, your grace," said the butler at the door. "We've got through to the chief constable."

The duke left, and the duchess sat up and wrung her sopped handkerchief; she made a pathetic picture.

Little Mr. Jones drank some soda water and staggered to his feet. His senses came back. He took the duchess by the arm, quite forgetting that she was anything except a sobbing, distraught girl.

"There now, my dear—there now! Come with me"—as he might have to his niece, Daisy—"come with me an' don't you fret, your gracey!" said little Jones, patting the hand he held.

The duchess ceased crying. A woman can always forget to be unhappy when there is someone else to comfort—and she believed Mr. Jones to be crazy.

"Come to the flowers," said Mr. Jones. "Come to the pretty flowers, my dear!"

"Oh, poor thing! He's silly—and I must humour him," said the duchess to herself. "Poor little man!" She rang her bell as she passed it and whispered to her maid to call the duke quickly.

Mr. Jones led the duchess, who still sniffed now and then, down the oaken stairway and on to the conservatory. Morning was coming wanly through the glass, the place looked dreary, with its litter of old programmes, chairs and burnt-out Chinese lanterns. The duchess shivered and signed to her husband, who came hurrying after her.

"Dicky!" She tapped her head and whispered aside: "He would come to the flowers. He's—poor thing—quite—— I had to humour him. I expect it was because I gave the diamonds to him here last night. Last night—— Oh-h!" The duchess sat down on a pot of maidenhair fern and wept afresh. "If I'd only taken them myself! If I——"

Mr. Jones went down to the big palm: he grubbed in the mould, throwing out handfuls of it—and then he flung round to the duchess.

“ There, my poor child ! ” he cried excitedly. “ There ! And there ! And there ! And don’t you fret any more, my dearies. ”

The Duchess of Dackminster sat gasping beneath a shower of earth and—diamonds ! Mr. Mosenthal’s great necklace glittered coldly in the dim light. The tiara, brooches, pendants and ornaments fell as hail on to her silken dressing gown. The duke, who had jumped forward to protect his wife, stood gasping.

“ You see, ” said little Mr. Jones, “ when I caught sight of the man’s eyebrow I grew afraid of bedrooms. The hiding was no doubt a risk ; but I intended to be up before the gardeners in the morning—so I just buried the diamonds here. The cases, ” observed Mr. Jones thoughtfully, “ are not likely to be carefully kept by those persons who took them—from under my bed. ”

The next moment the duchess had kissed Mr. Jones. She said she could not help it—then she caught his hands and danced him round among the flowers, with all the Mosenthal jewellery clattering on to the tiled floor. And then the duke relieved Mr. Jones from dancing, but shook his hands himself. And then the butler shook his hands and the French maid called him Napoleon—and Archibald Jones, with his swimming head, knew the proudest moments of his life—but he regretted two smashed pots of bulbs.

“ But if they had had time to open those cases—— ” said the duchess. “ Mr. Jones, you are

a brave man! They would have made you tell—tortured your poor other thumbs!”

Mr. Jones counted his thumbs carefully—he did not like to point out errors to a duchess—before he observed mildly that he had thought of quite half a dozen places to suggest searching in, and that the light must have come soon.

“You see, I laid before them the danger of murder,” he added; “and, for the rest, hurting can only hurt, your Grace—even if one bears pain badly, as Anna says I do.”

Mr. Jones was rather surprised when the duke shook his hand again; he considered that he had merely stated a simple fact.

Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Jones have two large photographs in silver frames on their chimneypiece, which they generally manage to show to their guests. Anna Jones is never quite sure that the duchess’s appearance in pink silk, with her hair loose, was quite nice; but then she says she knows what one may expect from the aristocracy. Also she strongly objects to an enormous palm, which the duchess, without any idea of lack of space, sent up as a memento of her gratitude.

Mr. Samuel Mosenthal heard the whole story in silence. When it was finished he sent for his own expensive physician to see Mr. Jones’s head, and he used language of a blighting and pungent nature.

“For if we sent anyone but an—er—er—well, a Jones,” he stormed, “every jewel would have

gone ! To leave 'em there unprotected in a flower-pot—oh, tub, if you like, Jones—there all night—my diamonds ! ”

“ You see, sir, I knew they would not realize my powers and resources,” said Mr. Jones mildly.

XVII

MR. JONES GOES TO JAIL

MR. SAMUEL MOSENTHAL sat biting at his penhandle when he ought to have been doing several other things. He was put out and he was rather frightened. Parcels of uncut stones had to reach him; he had to send stones away; the firm often bought up valuable old ornaments from distressed foreign nobles—these had to be fetched; and they had lost more in the year than they cared to think of.

The detectives said it was curious, because, as a rule, when a gang of thieves set to work they robbed from more firms than one. Mosenthals' was the only sufferer. Mr. Samuel bit his pen, and Mr. Amos preserved his pungent silence until Mr. Samuel bit the handle through, spat out the pieces, and swore softly at his younger brother for grumbling so hard.

"Internally!" snapped Mr. Samuel. "If you'd only say something—suggest something! The next thing they will do," he stormed, "is to open our safes here!"

Harris, their trusted messenger, coughed sadly and with some dismay.

"If there was anyone to suspect——" he said. "Last time I went as you suggested, Mr. Mosenthal—as an old man. Bless you, they knew it! They nearly had me at the Gare du Nord—banged into me as if disguises were nothing to them. A fellow with a shaved eyebrow did it."

Mr. Samuel banged the table.

"Jones's man!" he shouted—"Jones's man! He's taken it off."

Mr. Amos still said nothing gloomily.

"That eyebrow," said Mr. Samuel, "saved my diamonds at Dackminster. When you see it again, Harris, arrest the owner immediately!"

Here Mr. Amos broke the silence by saying the next time the eyebrow would be red or white, and in any case he did not think the police would care for it—and that he heard Leroux outside. A dapper Frenchman was shown into their private room and Mr. Samuel sent for Jones.

"You know Monsieur Leroux," he observed, "so I sent for you."

Leroux remarked pleasantly: "Ha! *V'là!* The desperado of the roof!"

Mr. Jones straightened his tie and tried to look five feet five; he thought to himself that he might really see about the patent heels he had read of in advertisements. He smiled kindly at Harris, who pulled his upper lip thoughtfully.

"The desperado!" said Leroux. "*Nom d'un*

chien!—a wondrous man! I saw them—afterwards.”

Mr. Jones shuddered; for Leroux referred to the two men whom he, Jones, had shot in defence of his employers' stones.

Leroux wanted rubies—he wanted emeralds—to complete a necklace of barbaric splendour. The steel safe opened its jaws and the Paris jeweller hovered over the rough stones in the compartments. Good rubies were scarce just then; he knew that Mosenthals' had picked some up. He weighed and considered; and he gave his order—one worth having. He hovered also over a peculiar pear-shaped pearl that Mr. Amos had just purchased from a Spanish lady—a wonderful thing of lustrous black, set round with little glowing emeralds.

Leroux thought that the Indian potentate who was wanting rubies and emeralds, all set in a flash of small brilliants, might also like some emeralds and a black pearl. Mr. Amos named a price that gave him a modest profit. Leroux said he would wire and get all at once.

“But you'll take the stones yourself—or send a man?” said Mr. Amos suddenly. “You must, Leroux!”

And Monsieur Leroux, *désolé*, regretted. His men were cutters—assistants. So far Mosenthals' had always supplied the messengers. As for his own part, he suffered from a weak heart and ran no risks.

“*Tiens!* From what you tell me,” said Leroux, “I should be attacked before Dovaire. *Non!*

Non ! I buy—you deliver. Monsieur Harrees here, he will come—or Monsieur Jo-anes, the so undaunted !”

Mr. Jones observed respectfully that he feared the city of Paris and would prefer not to go. Mr. Samuel fumed and Mr. Amos was silent. They were growing nervous. Monsieur Leroux suggested detectives ; Mr. Samuel snorted at the futility of the men whom he had employed.

Mr. Jones looked out of the window, dragged his thoughts from his sweet-pea seedlings and, looking at the safe, made a suggestion.

“ Write your directions, Mr. Amos,” he said. “ Write them out for him, if you will, please.”

Here Mr. Amos exploded into forcible speech. Did Mr. Jones imagine there was a mental wireless apparatus running from their office to the thieves’ ears ? Did he believe that someone was concealed under the table ? Here he tweaked at the blotting paper and upset the ink, which did not improve his peace of mind. Had Mr. Jones any other suggestions to make ? he inquired fiercely.

Mr. Jones remained blandly impassive. He merely said : “ Tut ! Tut ! How unfortunate ! ” when the ink went over.

“ The unsuspected, sir,” he said, “ is generally what we least suspect. My suggestion was merely a suggestion.”

“ The boiler,” said Mr. Samuel, as his brother fell back because he could find no words to help him, “ is still at your disposal when you find out the

mystery. Very well, Leroux, we'll deliver to you. And about those diamonds you wrote of—the old necklace? We purchase—Harris could bring it back. The new Canned Goods King wants it for his wife for her first court."

Leroux saw other things—uncut stones in the second safe—some of which he bought. He was sure to write for the necklace. Harris would carry a valuable parcel when he went on his journey.

"And I don't mind saying I wish myself safely back," said Harris glumly. "I'm not a nervous man, but all this business will make me one in time."

About ten days later, on a Saturday, Mr. Jones left the office with a joyful, soft spring afternoon before him. Anna, his wife, had gone to see her aunt; he was free! April flirted high above the chimney-pots, gleaming and dancing lower down, where she could find sootless space.

Mr. Jones's sweet peas were troubling him. He had heard from a nurseryman some little way out who had seedlings to sell and also geraniums for future bedding. The beauty of the day tempted Mr. Jones to undertake a long walk. He thought of his greenhouse, now sadly darkened by the palm; and he dreamed wistfully of a garden where he could have six flower beds instead of one, and a patch at the back full of vegetables fit for exhibition. He plodded on, a meek, unobtrusive little figure in black coat and tall hat, until the streets fell away and the endless, hideous monotony of the suburbs was with him. Mr. Jones saw nothing but beauty in

the rows of neat houses ; he yearned for the conservatories and beds full of wallflowers and forget-me-nots.

Then he missed his way ; he found himself suddenly in a poor street, mean and dingy, with shrill voices echoing here and there behind dirty windows, and flapping washes hung across sour patches of earth.

The street was narrow. Mr. Jones hurried from it into one narrower, but slightly cleaner ; and as he did so three hundred suffragettes came pouring along, surging in noisy might with Votes for Women displayed at all angles, since the hand of woman is not oversteady. Mr. Jones objected to idle females who struggled for votes. He walked on in rigid disapproval.

The leader of the suffragettes, a thin and bony woman, who was palpably drunk with excitement, espied the neat figure and called a sudden halt. She thrust a banner against Mr. Jones's nose as she demanded imperiously whether he sympathized with their cause.

" I do not in the least, madam ! " said Mr. Jones primly. " ' The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,' but it will never gain rule by rocking banners—unevenly," he added, looking up expressively.

Here the thin suffragette plunged into oratory ; she was joined by several colleagues, who mocked Mr. Jones.

" If you'd anything to do, or got any young men to walk out with, you wouldn't walk out in the

mud and shout," said Mr. Jones politely. " Good evening—er—ladies ! "

He had raised the wind, however ; he reaped a whirlwind of mockery. So he was a lord of creation, was he ? A ruler, was he ?—laughing at their cause, was he ?—a great, strong man !

Here the thin, stalwart lady tweaked off Mr. Jones's hat and stamped on it ; and Mr. Jones, outraged, called her a hussy. In a moment he found himself hustled, threatened ; they shrieked out they would lift him on their shoulders and carry him westward with Votes for Women pinned on his chest !

The very thought brought a chill crisp of horror down Mr. Jones's spine. Anna might be out walking ! Mr. Samuel—any of the clerks ! The women surged towards him and Mr. Jones took to his heels. He sped along the railings, looking for a fellow-man ; gained a moment's start and dashed up some steps to demand help. To his surprise, the door swung in to his touch ; he dashed through it, with ten women close behind him ; flung into a room on the left of a narrow hall, and plunged without hesitation right under a sofa, with steps clattering behind him. As he lay panting the thin suffragette thrust the door open violently and Mr. Jones believed himself lost.

" Gone upstairs," the lady said ; " lodges here, 'praps—the misery ! We'll call the others and fetch him. Do you hear, you sprat ? We'll fetch you ! " she sang out clearly.

"You will have to find me!" thought Mr. Jones, as he lay flatter.

The steps and voices died away. Mr. Jones peered out cautiously. He was in a dingy parlour, shabbily furnished, with the inevitable vases on the mantelshelf, and the chiffonier, sacred to the lodgers' bread and butter, in the corner.

The house was quite empty of any noise. Mr. Jones mentally conned the words he would have used to the "girl" if she had been his. The patch of carpet under the sofa had not been dusted for a month—its acrid taste was in his mouth; and he thought he had better come out. The front door creaked and banged; he heard steps.

"They have come for me!" whispered little Jones, crouching flat. "I will not be made a guy of. I shall resist!"

The steps came nearer. Mr. Jones looked and gasped! For Mr. Grant, fourth clerk at Mosenthals', came into the room; and, even as Mr. Jones was about to say Peek-a-boo! playfully and see Mr. Grant's pleased surprise, he choked speech back—for the man who followed Grant had very large eyebrows, and little Jones felt sure he recognized him as the robber of Paris and Dackminster Castle.

Mr. Jones said to himself: "What is this?" He felt a thrill of excitement and he flattened himself in the dust. On thinking carefully he was certain that his appearance to this man Antoine might cause unpleasantness.

"House empty, hey?" said Antoine. "Mrs.

Landlady out—she leaves note to say so on the table. No one in the place, eh ? ”

Mr. Grant said a little irritably that no one ought to be—and Mr. Jones quite agreed with him.

“ Walls have ears,” Grant grinned—“ eh, Froggy ? And men throats ! ”

He opened the chiffonier and took out some bottles and glasses. The smell of tobacco came pungently to Mr. Jones’s nostrils. He trusted he would not sneeze, for he felt he might be in danger ; he had not liked the hint as to throats. Grant laughed again. He began to talk. Lying dustily, afraid to move, growing cramped and chilled, Mr. Jones listened.

“ When this Harris takes the rubies——” began Grant. “ I’ve got it all here. He leaves to-night from Charing Cross, disguised, with his rubies in a box labelled cigars. The French customs people have been notified. Well, we’ll track him from his house, and we must secure him between Calais and Amiens. A jab of this needle in his wrist will make him sick enough for us to mind him.”

“ We are on for business, then, this time ? ” said Antoine grimly. “ *Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu !* If we carry him away ; but surely we cannot bring him back alive.”

Mr. Jones’s spine crisped as young Grant, whose claret and chops he had eaten, said brutally that Harris could be left somewhere to take his chance.

“ For this ends it,” said Grant. “ We’ll get off. I’m on this job myself ! I’ll see these things cut

up. I'm on a holiday, you see, for a few days. Father very ill! Mr. Grant's resignation will cause no surprise."

"*Saperlotte!*" swore Antoine. "But that electrician's job of mine was good, *mon bon!*"

"When I came under their smug noses and drilled a hole just above Alec Grant's desk——" grinned the clerk. "I had some trouble with it too."

The sofa creaked. Mr. Jones felt obliged to start. He remembered when the partners were both away a man came from Lee & Wait's to look at the newly installed lights. Mr. Mosenthal had made some complaint before leaving. The man went to work. He found it necessary to strip the walls in several places—and he stayed quite late one evening to get the job finished.

The treachery of it had induced Mr. Jones to heave his shocked head against the under ribs of the sofa. This Grant sitting and listening! The gaps in the robberies were caused by Grant's occasional absences when the partners gave their directions!

Would the two never go—never give him a chance to get away to tell Mr. Samuel and save Harris? Harris might start before he could get the information through. Harris would travel disguised. The sofa creaked.

"Rats; the place is full of 'em," Mr. Grant said. "Rotten old hole, but it's off the map and handy to meet at."

Mr. Jones listened to fresh revelations. Some

horsehair, oozing out, was tickling him horribly. He had moved along a little to escape that and to ease his aching bones. At this point his spine crisped again. Antoine, the uneven-eyebrowed, was speaking in a low, cold voice.

"But somehow," he said, "I want to be even with that miserable brainless lucky-bag who by shooting in the opposite direction killed Derek and Le Rat. It is he who crosses us always, *mon ami*; and being a fool he does what you expect not." Mr. Jones said to himself that this was rude; he made a mental note of it. "To shoot and hit. That dried-up cabbage stalk! To catch that other fool drunk—to bury his diamonds in a flower pot at Dackminster! *Nom de Dieu!* but I would take pleasure in slicing across that little throat if it were not for the law! Yet, in a year or so," said Antoine fiercely, "Jones shall suffer. If it were only he to-night! A little extra drug and—*poof!*"

"And poof! poof!" murmured Jones soundlessly. "Yes; but it is not he—*mang ami* Antoine."

"Where is this Jones? Why are they not sending him?" rasped out the Frenchman.

Grant said rudely that doubtless Jones was catching slugs or digging up dandelions.

"Earthworm!" said Antoine, and spat.

They sat until the dusk came on grey feet outside and the gas was lighted. Then, after an absence in the small bedroom, Jones could hear their voices discussing the merits of different disguises. They

left ; he could see nothing but one flash of red under a long coat.

The front door banged. Little Archibald Jones crawled out and rubbed his knees. He was grimed with dust—he had no hat—his collar was filthy—his clothes smeared ; but he only looked at the clock. “ Oh, Charing Cross ! ” he gasped as he rushed from the room. He encountered a lady in rusty black on the doorstep, all but knocking her over.

“ Been to call, madam,” said Mr. Jones hurriedly but politely ; and he could not understand why the elderly lady should have sat upon her own doorstep and wailed “ Police ! Robber ! ” down the lonely road.

Absolutely unaware of his disreputable appearance, Mr. Jones scuttled on, racing into the next street of small shops. Here he dashed into one and bought a hat ; that it was of jaunty green felt was as nothing to him ; it was the nearest thing he saw. The shopman took three shillings with a doubtful air ; in fact, he bit the half-crown sharply. But Mr. Jones fled again, oblivious of everything save the need for haste. He ran along the quiet streets, panting, melting ; his clothes covered with dust, his face dirty ; the green hat perched incongruously on his head.

“ When I get back,” panted Mr. Jones thoughtfully, “ I shall buy a home exerciser ; this lack of condition is appalling ! . . . Quite appalling ! ” he repeated as he toiled on. “ Yes ; home exerciser ! ”

It seemed hours before he found a cabstand and directed the driver of a knock-kneed horse to fly until he met a taxi. Time was passing; the train left at nine and Mr. Jones was not sure what could be done.

It was joy to leave the crawl of the horse-drawn vehicle and swoop, petrol-driven, towards Queen's Gate. Here Mr. Jones met a reverse. The footman who opened the door gave one glance at the dust-begrimed coat and face, at the green hat, and remarked: "Nothin' 'ere for your sort!"—and shut the door crisply.

In vain did little Jones ring and pound; no one came; the footman, in fact, watched with a smile from the dining-room window.

Mr. Jones grew desperate. He saw that the tradesmen's entrance was open and he rushed through it into the kitchen. The cook, who was watching the kitchen maid prepare supper, turned with a scream and threw her apron over a silver spoon on the table. Mr. Jones spurned the kitchen maid's attempt to stop him with the frying-pan, and shouted for the butler, who knew him.

It was a matter of thousands—a robbery; he clung to the sphinxlike head servant.

"Where is Mr. Samuel?"

"Not in. Mr. Samuel is dining with a foreign prince in Park Lane; will not be home until late."

Mr. Jones wrote the number down and rushed out panting; he was now quite certain that he would start a course of home exercise.

The cook took her apron off the spoon with a wrathful air, and the footman who had spurned Mr. Jones listened to several things sullenly.

The footman who opened the door at Park Lane was given no chance of shutting it, for the little man made speedy way into the hall and demanded Mr. Samuel Mosenthal on the most urgent business. Here, for the first time, Jones caught sight of himself in a glass—and he shuddered with dismay.

The footman, joined by a second, mentioned "Meat course" in a doubtful voice; and he stared at little Jones aghast, hoping, aside, that it was a murder.

Mr. Jones rubbed himself down with the edge of a coat lying on a chair and awaited his employer, while he confided to the footman his hopes of growing orchids. Mr. Samuel, painted with a diner's blush, came quickly into the hall.

"Sir," said Mr. Jones, leaping up, "it is the boiler!"

Mr. Samuel looked at his clerk quite sadly; in somewhat acid tones he suggested that he feared it was the bottle.

"The boiler!" cried Jones. "The thieves! In here!" He pushed Mr. Samuel into a room off the hall and told his story quite calmly and precisely. "The girl's carelessness," he finished up, "accounting for my appearance, sir; and the hat being the nearest, I did not remark its unsuitability above a morning coat."

Mr. Samuel was not thinking of dust any more.

He ran to the door and down to a string of waiting motors.

"Charing Cross!" he thundered to Marks. Mr. Jones had only driven in the small car; the purring might of this fifty-sixty was as magic to him.

"Risk a summons!" snapped Mr. Samuel through the tube. "Get on!"

They got on, to find the boat train had just left.

"A special!" Mr. Samuel stormed into an office, directed, ordered.

A special could not catch the train. By the time it was started and the lines cleared the Calais boat would be ready to cast off.

Mr. Samuels stood biting his fingers. One could not wire to France to catch unknown thieves. He could not stop Mr. Harris, who was travelling under an assumed name.

"Which I don't know!" almost wailed Mr. Samuel. "Amos gave him his directions." Then he wheeled to the telephone office and got through to Dover. Chance favoured him—the man he sought was dining, as he hoped he might be, at The Lord Warden.

Mr. Jones, busily brushing his coat—the frying-pan had bespattered him with grease—listened to a bewildering request for a yacht called Seagull, and for steam up ready to start.

"We'll catch it!" said Mr. Samuel. "I thought Peterson might dine on shore. Come, Jones!"

"Where to?" said Mr. Jones.

"Dover!" rasped out Samuel Mosenthal. "We

may be in time for the boat. I've wired the police to be ready. We'll want you, Jones. Come along!"

Mr. Jones put on the green hat; he spent two-pence on slabs of chocolate for his supper and followed meekly.

"If they have gone you must follow them," said Mr. Samuel. "I cannot—I have to be here to-morrow. Also, you know them."

"I do not," said Mr. Jones firmly. "I do not, sir; but their disguises will be pitted against my powers of observation."

"Go, get in! . . . Now go, Marks!" said Mr. Samuel sharply. "Dover! Let her out!"

They swooped and dived through the traffic, darting perilously, rushing, checking, flying forward, until the streets gave way to rows of drab houses—until there were trees and gardens, and the lamps picked up the emptiness of a country road.

Checking suddenly, Marks took out his spare petrol tins. He explained that he had only a little in the tank, and it was better to fill up thirty miles from London. A variety of policemen had practised throat exercises as the car had roared past them—Marks taking no notice.

But between ——— and Canterbury misfortune fluttered her wings. Marks, having filled up, came round to fasten a loose catch in the bonnet, when a heavy touring car came rushing by. The roads were greasy, the driver one of the men who consider that near shaves show their dauntless driving

powers. Before Marks could get aside the tourer skidded and struck him heavily with her mud-guard—her driver flying on without taking any notice.

The result was that Marks crumpled up, going down with a groan on to the wet road, his arm broken and his hip badly bruised, while Mr. Samuel got out and raved to the watery night that it was all over.

“I can’t drive!” stormed Mosenthal as he examined Marks’s injuries. “I can’t drive, and here we are—nowhere!”

Mr. Jones looked reproachfully at Marks; he remarked judiciously that no doubt Mr Samuel would now proceed to learn, and was pained when his employer snarled at him. People from a neighbouring inn came in answer to calls for help. The big car stood inert on the road, her lamps flashing golden lights on to the wet road.

“I,” said Mr. Jones precisely, “found it quite easy to learn to drive, sir.”

“You!” said Mr. Samuel. “You!”

“’Eld the wheel,” murmured Marks feebly. “Guides well. Thought it no ’arm, sir, to let him guide sometimes.”

“I have done so most successfully!” said Jones. “If you consider it worth the risk of your valuable car, Mr. Samuel, I’ll try to get her on for a little, to some town.”

Mr. Samuel stepped towards the car. He looked at the small man in the green hat—at the meek, dirty little face.

“You can murder,” he rasped out, “and steal!

By Heaven! You Jones, there's no reason you shouldn't be able to break the law behind the wheel. You shall take me to Dover. Have at it, Jones, and endeavour to get back alive to your geraniums."

"Oh, if you wish it," said Mr. Jones quite calmly and without surprise. "I have learned the speeds and brakes." But he looked nervously at the men who were attending to Marks. Murder and steel were both unpleasant words.

"Corners an' carts!" murmured Marks sadly.

"Have at it!" roared Mr. Samuel, his expression heroic. His face set grimly, he reft the motor cap from Marks' drooping head, placed the green Hom-burg on the landlord's, left money and directions for Marks, and stood ready to resume the journey.

"Wind her up, Napoleon Jones! I'd risk more to catch these fiends!" slid out Samuel Mosenthal between clenched teeth.

"If I scrape her," said Mr. Jones, "you will excuse me. It is really as easily learned as shooting." Then, exceedingly modestly, he took the wheel, and felt the isolation of importance as he realized that he was in sole command of the big car—that she must sway to his touch, depend on him for the safety of her paint and varnish. To himself he never gave a thought. "I have no licence," he remarked as he slipped his clutch in. Mr. Samuel, getting up beside him, said he was thinking of a shorter word, beginning with *l*; in fact, life!

The car slid off with a lurch to one side, was righted, lurched to the other, and flung forward

in her might. In a moment little Archibald Jones felt the hidden power of the monster in his charge—felt the power of her as she purred into the darkness, the rush of fleeting air, the joyous danger of the lamp-lit road.

“ It is really quite enjoyable ! ” he said gently.

Mr. Samuel said “ Is it ? ” very grimly. He was thinking of the market cart that had been shaved by an inch. “ Get a move on her then ! ” he snorted. “ We’re crawling ! ”

The speedometer showed twenty-five up a slope. Mr. Jones sighed vaguely. To guide a small car with a man sitting beside you is very different from racing through the night at a terrifying speed, with the lamps raking black objects too suddenly from the darkness, and the great car lurching as one dashed past them. Get a move on her ! Mr. Jones was there to obey his employer. His life was insured.

“ One will strike so very hard when one does strike at a fast pace ! ” he said apologetically ; but he opened his throttle and let her go.

Go !—she seemed to pour herself along the road, purring savagely as she spurned the miles beneath her wheels. They got through Canterbury in some miraculous fashion. Not once but twenty times they avoided collisions by sheer luck. They lurched and bounded to the unskilful hands on the wheel. They tore through villages where watchful policemen shouted frantic warning ; the air grew cooler as they flew, until there was salt on its breath and the lights of Dover twinkled below them.

"You see, sir," observed Mr. Jones, taking a corner on one wheel and checking with a jar of brakes before a cab, "I did not exaggerate when I said that I could drive."

Mr. Samuel wiped his face and unclenched his hands.

The lights of The Lord Warden were before them—when, in avoiding a woman, Mr. Jones took a lamp-post in his stride and put out the engine with the shock. His apologies were lost as he was almost hurled to the pavement, with his employer's voice saying triumphantly that a lamp put out was better than a life; and the car, one front wheel crumpled, was abandoned in the street.

Another motor was at the hotel door. A man in blue serge waited on the steps, watching for them. The Seagull was ready for her rush to Calais, he explained.

"But I have no idea what to do, and I cannot wheel a steamer!" said Mr. Jones, who was really getting bewildered—yet ready to obey.

In the few minutes left to them Mr. Samuel thrust gold into Mr. Jones's hand. He was to penetrate the disguises of the plotters. The wires had already warned the police all along the line. He was to get the men arrested and warn Harris of his danger. And he only had as far as Amiens. Little Mr. Jones clung to the rail of the steam yacht and looked quite upset, yet relieved to find he was not to command the yacht.

"I will do my utmost," he said determinedly;

"and that, Mr. Samuel, is not to be despised. My utmost, sir—especially if it is not rough upon the waves."

"Drove a sixty car," said Mr. Samuel, to his friend Lord Petersham, "nearly the whole way here, on four lessons from Marks! Got right to the lamp-post before he broke it up. No, I can't come! I must speak in the House to-morrow. I'm awfully obliged, Peter! Now wire me, Jones!" he said.

"*Dépêche*, sir," corrected Mr. Jones softly. "*Petit blow*."

"Wire, blow, telephone—and get 'em!" commanded Mr. Samuel. "It will be worth your while if you do—remember."

"Had anything to eat?" said Petersham kindly as the yacht cast off. "You're white as a ghost."

"The chocolates," said Mr. Jones faintly, "were forgotten in the excitement—it being difficult to chew and guide a motor, my lord."

Lord Petersham took the little man to the saloon and ordered supper. He listened with a curious expression to Mr. Jones's account of his day's adventures. The steward brought champagne, which, Mr. Jones explained, recalled duchesses to him.

"And palm tubs," said Jones—"palm trees, my lord. I never drank champagne before. I think it induced—unusually brilliant powers of thought. The Joneses," he added, "have always been noted for intellect. My father got the good-conduct prize at his grammar school."

Lord Petersham took barley water, sipping it

thoughtfully. He said he thought he ought to go on to Paris with Mr. Jones; it was sometimes so difficult to get understood by the French. He listened with interest to the story of the rest of the robberies.

"And you shot two men!" he muttered. "You!"

"It was completely against my inclination," said Mr. Jones earnestly. "I warned them of the cow's—that is, bull's-eye; I told them in French and English."

"Antony," said Lord Petersham, "bring me a whisky-and-soda. I feel I want one. And now," he went on, "you are going to try to catch these two ruffians—trying alone—and you are not afraid?"

"Mr. Samuel has shown me great kindness," said Mr. Jones, a little stiffly. "I should indeed be ungrateful to show lack of courage in doing such little things as he directs me to."

Lord Petersham murmured, "Little things—lives!" to the neglected barley water at his elbow; he took a glass of whisky-and-soda.

The yacht tore as a live thing through the choppy Channel waves. She picked up Calais lights just as the mailboat was due; and, as Mr. Jones, still in his motor cap, gave a crisp "*Rien à déclarer parceque je porte rien à déclarer*" to the customs officer who interrogated him, he realized that he had caught the boat train. But how in that crowd was he to find the two he sought? If he could even

see Harris—— He rushed up and down, peering into faces, stopping inoffensive people, scanning the people in the buffet.

He singled out an old lady with a parrot's cage, and followed her up and down to see if her petticoats were red. He was sure he had seen something red as the two went out.

He whispered "Harris!" into the ear of a choleric retired officer, still feeling green from his journey, and retreated hurriedly as the irate old gentleman bellowed: "De Vere Charteris—you sir!" in offended tones.

They were starting. "*En voiture, messieurs et mesdames!*" And the surging crowd was still a blank.

Little Jones was tired and cold, but he did not think of resting. Up and down he went, peering into carriages, fearful of asking for help, growing depressed as he saw no bushy eyebrows—no face resembling Harris'.

A carriage with only three people in it attracted his attention. One of the men in it wore his hat pulled hard down, almost on to his eyes; his companion was a smart-looking girl with a hard face and a thick veil. There was room there.

Little Mr. Jones went in. His coat collar was turned up, his cap pulled down, and he still wore his motor goggles. His idea had been that Harris would immediately recognize him and make some sign; but he quite forgot that he was rather effectually disguised.

An elderly man dozed in the corner, a grey cropped beard hiding his mouth and chin. Mr. Jones began to stare at the man in the slouched hat. Had he or had he not uneven eyebrows? Surely one was painted over! The little man leaned forward excitedly, and the train began to slacken speed. What could he do?

Then the traveller in the slouched hat crossed to the window, saying loudly they were just at Amiens. He struggled with the strap.

Mr. Jones heard him say in an irritated tone that it was stuck, then heard him ask the elderly man to give a pull.

Then he heard a faint exclamation, an apology, something about a sharp pin; and the elderly man leaned back as if he were tired, so tired that in a moment his eyes closed. He called out something thickly, struggled and fell back; the train slid into Amiens.

And Mr. Jones knew at last—this was Harris, drugged as the villains had planned. With a positive whoop, Jones dragged off the slouched hat—to see plainly that one eyebrow was false.

"*Nom de Dieu ! Le Jones !*" yelled Antoine. "*Scélérat ! Rat ! Pig ! Jones—imbecile !*"

"Imbecile yourself!" returned Mr. Jones, clinging to the Frenchman. "I have you, *mon ami !* They are warned right along to watch for a thief."

The girl said something quickly in French. Little Jones, shaken like a rat, clung bravely. The guards,

porters, and gendarmes were at the door. All was success! Mr. Jones was trying to think of several French words that he would require—when his throat was gripped, his hands forced back.

“So you have me—son of a pig!” hissed Antoine. “Hold there! I’ve got the man! The robber, caught red-handed!”

“I saw him try to do it,” said the girl calmly. “He has drugged that poor fellow there.”

Mr. Jones gave a choked yelp of horror. He flung out protestations in broken French, intermixed with some words he knew of Italian. He raved at the officers who held him roughly. He wailed at Antoine and accused him of being a *mensongeur*. It was all in vain! He was the thief, caught by the expected watcher; they were lifting Harris, the only man who could have saved him, and little Jones saw Antoine’s long, powerful fingers lifting the unconscious man’s bag.

“Then, for mercy’s sake, save the jewels!” said Jones. “They are in a cigar box in that bag!”

Antoine snarled; they were not; someone in authority found them in Harris’s inner pocket, where he had evidently preferred to carry them. But his knowledge seemed to the French police conclusively to prove Jones’s guilt.

“Search him!” said Antoine. “Don’t listen to him! He is a desperate villain, messieurs. I saw him inject a drug into Monsieur Harris’s wrist.”

Jones was dusty, dirty; his motor cap two sizes too large for him. Oh, he was most plainly a thief!

Mr. Jones raved on in French of his own making, while Antoine gave all the details of the capture and skilfully extracted information concerning the wires received at Amiens.

“ There, then, is the thief you were told to be on the lookout for ! ” said Antoine dramatically.

Here the head of the police remarked dubiously that their instructions had been to watch for two thieves. Antoine, without a trace of French accent, said that was quite right. He was the messenger for Mosenthals’.

“ This lady here saw the whole affair,” said Antoine.

And little Mr. Jones heard with horror the lady describe how Jones had gone to open the window, got this Mr. Harris to help him, and dug something sharp into his wrist. The lady gave her name sweetly as Miss Brown, of Number 5, Kensington Gardens Road, London.

Prying fingers werethrust into Mr. Jones’s pockets; a hypodermic syringe smelling of some subtle drug was found in one.

“ Oh, *mensonges*—plots ! ” said Mr. Jones wearily. “ *Vous sotts ! Bois têtes !* Will you not *voyez la vérité ?* Oh, but I say, wait until Harris wakes ! Take off his beard and fan him, *monsoos*, *je vous entreat !* ”

The French are a polite nation, however. Those in authority took the *mensonges* and *sotts* personally. Struggling still, little Jones was walked off to be locked up, while a wire stating that the thief had been

caught after desperate resistance was flashed to London.

Mr. Jones tried to sit down on everything he met. He begged for common sense ; he said he could make allowances for foreigners' brains, but he wanted mere intelligence from them. He was finally plunged into a cell, where he sat down and said "God save our gracious King!" several times to the rude people who now asked him questions in broken English.

"God save our—while they have escaped!" snapped Mr. Jones. "Waiting for the English police to take me over! Oh, Mr. French Police, *je suis étonné at vôtre tête epaisse. Restez! Ces deux will restez à démang, je vous faire un pari,*" said Mr. Jones earnestly—"un sovereign à un sou that they voulez not!"

They left him to his fate, however. Towards morning Harris, looking exceedingly ill, staggered into the cell where little Jones sat in chill misery. Harris had removed his beard.

"I'd know the fellow, of course," said Harris. "Why, good Lord—Jones! You were the little blighter in the motor cap, Jones? Why didn't you speak? What has happened?"

"I was in the motor cap," said Jones bitterly. "*Oui!* My goggles," he added spitefully, "were needed by the police of France—by these *monsoos*, who would not listen to me—Jones!"

The inspector began to stroke his chin dubiously. As Harris translated Mr. Jones's story, he appeared

to grow more dubious still. Presently he sat down and crumpled up drearily.

“The smartness of it!” he muttered, as he sent a messenger speeding to the hotel where he had seen the victorious thief-catcher take a room.

“And a Frenchman too!” said Mr. Jones, with withering sarcasm. “He thought of it! Bah! Had it not been for me you would probably have let them take the rubies.”

Monsieur Carron said several things explosively. Then he listened to Harris’s opinion of his intelligence given in fluent French, and to Mr. Jones’s opinion on the same subject given in French and English very effectively mixed—and he listened meekly.

“But the rubies have escaped!” said Harris wanly.

The rubies had escaped! So also had Antoine and Mr. Grant.

The tubes in the wall were bricked up; and Mr. Jones, who now lives farther out, has his hothouse, where he labours assiduously. He often talks of foreign stupidity and nothing on earth would induce him to go to France!

“And now,” said Mr. Samuel to his brother, “who found out things for us, Amos?”

“A fool!” said Amos, which, in the circumstances, was rude of him.

XVIII

THE SALE AND THE SELLER

WHEN the Royces bought Leenane Castle, Cahervalley county hummed with excitement. For years the old grey hump of masonry had looked coldly fireless at the world; languished behind closed shutters when the hounds drew the straggling laurels close to the hall door.

People came to see Leenane, and went away dreaming sadly of how much money it would take to furnish the huge rooms, of how much coal the monster grates would eat up. The stables, loose boxes about the size of ordinary breakfast rooms, dropped into decay; doors slipped from their hinges; damp spots grew on ceilings; and year by year the chances of letting the ancestral home of the O'Shaughnessys grew less and less.

"Rich; they must be rich. Who are they, these Royces?" ran the question.

Cornelius Royce made no secret of his origin to Sir Tom O'Shaughnessy's agent. He had been born not far from Leenane, a mere farmer's son. He had got what he termed good schooling, and chance had

made him a millionaire before he was fifty. An old American had taken a fancy to him, directed his steps on the thorny path of business ; the dollars which bought Leenane and rest were the result.

Now, with a daughter and a son, Corny Royce came to end his days in the land of his fathers, and took the largest place which he could find to do it in.

Painters, plasterers, slaters, hurled themselves upon the house with tempered zeal. Sometimes they worked, and very often they did not, yet new tiles gradually appeared on the square turrets ; new mangers and racks got, somehow, into the stables ; a patent weed-killer killed the grass between the cobble stones, and, incidentally, all the caretaker's chickens. One of the plasterers fell off his ladder, and with whisky-laden breath, blamed it for "an 'onstiddy devil that rocked for the dинth of sphite under his legs."

Maple's satellites appeared from London in the wake of monster vans, striking awe into easygoing minds by their quick methods.

" 'Tis here an' there, and here now, an' with a whip a room is compleate," observed Mrs. Ryan to the shaken plasterer. " An' hardly a thing that'd catch ye're eye in the lot. Just ould dark wood and the like of that Sir Timothy soult ; an' dark scrambles of oak in the dinin' room, an' ould empty war soldiers in the hall like there was before—rows of them."

Maple's man was, fortunately, an artist ; he had got carte blanche.

Mrs. Ryan considered the electric lighting positively dangerous. "Whin ye might have good ile lamps, that anyways if they did fall might set fire to the hall, but wouldn't strike ye dead with a blasht."

She fingered the switches respectfully, and declined to use them in the housekeeper's room.

Mr. Royce wrote to her for servants. He wanted a cook who could cook. Housemaids, footmen, a butler; he directed that the footmen were to wear livery of a dull blue and crimson; he wanted all things to fit his house.

"Save us!" said Mrs. Ryan, ordering out the new inside trap. "Miss Doyle will never have what'll match this grandyer."

Miss Doyle had not. But Mrs. Ryan's own son, having passed a portion of his time as boots at Lisdoonvara, was convinced he would be a footman of merit, accompanied by her nephew, who had cleaned the boots and knives at his last stable boy's place. Mrs. Ryan's nieces were also housemaids, and the new butler's nose making her confident that an open cellarette would soothe all difficulties, the housekeeper breathed more easily.

Early in October, a Mercédès laid its wicked-looking bonnet by the hall door steps, and the Royces came to their new dwelling-place.

Cornelius Royce was tall and active, shrewdly benevolent looking. Miss Honora Royce was exceedingly pretty; and Martin, the son, was an ingenuous-looking youth, with a guileless manner

and half a dozen complications of thought hidden behind his open blue eyes.

Cornelius simply stood on the doorstep, and looked across the park to where the purple mountain melted into an evening sky.

"Ireland—God bless her!" he said as he went in.

Honora unloosed four dogs from a variety of hampers, and was without surprise when the last of Mrs. Ryan's chickens suffered a hurried death.

"They do love hens," said Honora affably. "Poor dears, they've had none to hunt in London—and they were so tired of travelling."

Mrs. Ryan's inner voice called the terriers "vilyins," aloud she merely said:

"Vo! vo! an' it a hin"—and directed an unseen Bridget to run out and get the creature in so that it would do for the soup.

Two other motors appearing on the avenue, one of the painters remarked that "'twas like a day's hunting," as he came down to help with the luggage.

Martin Royce shaded his eyes thoughtfully, taking a long tour to look, he said, for a room with an end to it. He found one in the west turret, where he directed his father's man to put his things.

Jamesy Ryan, one of the footmen, carried up a bag and laid it down with the remark that the "chimbley there smoked sorryful; he knew, for he kep a sick pup in the room onst."

"Chimneys," said Martin, "can be mended. Will you show me the way downstairs now? I get lost here."

"An' welcome," said Jamesy politely—he had been the stable boy.

"God save us; don't ye know that niver a word but 'Yes, sir' should pass ye're lips," admonished the cousin who had been a boots: "that is sthrange talk inside ye're gran' blue coat."

Martin went to the stables. Here the new head groom, who was Mrs. Ryan's first cousin by marriage, was looking at the motors with visible distaste. Two bay trappers purchased from Mrs. Ryan's brother were as yet the only horses in the yard.

Martin plunged into the subject next his heart. He wanted horses—hunters. He had hunted at Cambridge. He would buy six, seven, ten—any number of hunters, immediately.

"Ye nivir had call now to buy any yerself," said Ryan, coughing discreetly.

"Had call—er—no," said Martin.

Whereupon Ryan told him that he should "have a care of horse-dalers." "They can trim a horse as aisy as ye'd do ye're hair," said the old groom. "It is betther, sir, to rely on thim that has understandin' in the buyin' of horses. There is me nephew, now, has the natest bay, that breedy he might run in the Durby, and cliver as a sthable cat."

Martin, much impressed, stayed to listen. He returned to the magnificence of the drawing-room to find his sister pouring tea from a silver gilt teapot, with Jamesy and Peter hovering near in evident indecision of mind.

Hanley, the butler, believed that they were following him out.

"Will we hand around, Miss?" said Jamesy at length.

"You will not," observed Honora briefly. "You will go away. Irish footmen," she went on, "are peculiar, and oh! Marty, how many hunters are there to ride?"

Martin replied mildly that hunters were not produced in this way. He repeated Ryan's teachings glibly. They were to avoid horse-dealers, and the groom would buy treasures for them.

"From his relations," said Mr. Royce quietly.

Martin laid down a piece of plum cake. "How did you know that?" he asked.

"Because they always do," said his father. "That's human nature, especially in Ireland."

Martin here observed he thought the cook must be a plumber, she was so fond of lead; and gave the rest of his cake to his terrier.

Martin's ideas of buying horses began to grow confused. He had the shrewdness of his race, combined with the power of deep thought. Ryan had induced him to put horse-dealers from his mind; his father now induced him to put head grooms and their cousins in the same place.

"We will write to some of the really big men and get what we want," said Cornelius. "One may pay, but one gets a good thing."

"Fattened up, thrimmed, three hairs on thim in place of a tail; not fit to go for two months, an'

maybe niver across a fince, an' ye robbed with it all."

These words of wisdom floated before Martin's mental vision. He had a rooted dislike to wasting money. He dreaded that he would go forth and buy his own horses, and get something hard and fit to go.

For the rest of the evening he buried himself behind various books on the horse, coming forth from the study with the melancholy certainty that that noble animal's bones and sinews were given to him as a means of keeping veterinary surgeons from poverty, since from foot to thigh there seemed to be something they could get about every half-inch.

The breakfast-room at Leenane looked out to where the river ran silver between banks festooned in bronze and scarlet. Silver mists were crouching in the hollows, and the softness of the Irish air came peat-laden from the bog beyond the park.

Cornelius looked out on river and distant blue-grey hills. Millionaire, successful man—yet he thought enviously of a brown-skinned urchin who had poached with trembling joy in that river, whose boots had been broken, his clothes ragged, yet who had owned what Cornelius could never know again—youth. It was his part to look back, as his children looked forward. The miles seem to grow very short, the road narrow towards the end of the track.

Martin was smoking and thinking of hunters when Honora, slightly flushed, reappeared from a visit to the kitchen.

"The cook is very much offended at your remarks about the cake, Martin Jamesy told her. She says she threw twelve eggs, no less, into it, an' if the oven wint agin' her 'twas no fault of hers. She says her cakes are that light that when she'd lay one down 'twould sthay in the same sphot if a breath of air came through the windy, and she wants a bottle of whisky for another."

Here Honora sat down and laughed helplessly.

"Hanley," observed her father, "also wished for a bottle to do justice to my hunting hats. He said they should be his particular care. I think," went on Mr. Royce thoughtfully, "we will keep the drinkables locked up."

"The cook, madam," said Hanley, "wishes to know if you are sending her the whisky for her cakes."

"Tell her I am wiring to Fuller's for cakes," said Miss Royce unevenly. "Hers might fly away—that is——"

"There is a horse at the door, yer honour Mister Martin, waitin' on yet," announced Jamesy over the butler's shoulder.

It was the breedy possession of Ryan's cousin by marriage. Except that it was lame from curbs it was a very likely-looking hunter. Martin produced his book, located the excrescences on the hock, and shook his head.

He did not know Ryan or his cousin.

"Wait," said Ryan's relation lightly. "Wait now."

Without the faintest hesitation he put the bay at a big heap of timbers left by the workmen. It arched over cleverly, and then cantered across the lawn, and slipped over the sunk fence without an effort.

"Let ye get up, Mister Martin," said Ryan.

In half an hour, with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes, Martin had sent the bay to the stables.

He might possibly have bought other good and unsound hunters, if his father had not been called away, leaving him alone with Honora.

Mr. Royce sent down three from a big dealer in Dublin, and one putting Honora down at the first bank, Martin was doubly determined as to dealers. The fact of its further clever performances did not satisfy him. He gathered up two or three screws, but the opening meet drew near, and he wanted at least six more.

"To have out three a day, maybe," as Ryan said sarcastically.

Then among the influx of visitors, the Daylys came to call.

Mrs. Dayly had a voice which swept the friendless to her heart. She was full of openness and truth and good advice. Mr. Dayly, junior—Mr. Dayly, senior, sat somewhere in an office—was large as his mother, with a seat and hands riding which made a brute show itself off and a good horse look perfection. His mother quoted Archie at each breath. The Miss Daylys giggled a good deal, but reserved speech for more private occasions.

When Martin talked of hunters, Mr. Dayly swept him into a circle of sense.

There was but one to go to—a fellow sportsman and a gentleman. Now Archie always had a horse or two. Wouldn't they come to luncheon, and maybe one would suit.

Archie, who had studied horses' legs, but not in books, said there were two nice horses that he might spare. Topppers, stayers, goers, equine paragons.

Martin Royce's heart was light within him. He had met the right man at last. Honora was not so sure, but she was impressed by Mrs. Dayly's loving manner, and she accepted the invitation.

"A little bit of food," said Maria Dayly impressively; "they must not expect grandeur; but they must put up with a cutlet and a bird."

When Martin got into his car next day, he told Ryan he was going to look at horses. The "have a care, then, an' look twice," he put down to pique because he had refused to buy another cousin's grey mare, with an enlarged knee.

Carrickholt House beamed hospitably from the top of a steep slope—a big, bleak house, with the few stunted laurels round it crouching down to try to keep out of the wind.

The little bit of food partook of the nature of an elaborate dinner; with two dishes of cutlets to start with; and four wild ducks dexterously carved by Archie. There were also four sweets.

Then while the light held they hurried to the

stables. Here, carefully shut up, blooming knee-deep in straw, were the hunters.

One brown, light middled and high in the leg, took Martin's unskilled fancy. He rode it, cantered, jumped it . . . was not at all dismayed by the price of two hundred.

Among the others was a bay, a well-bred, long, low horse, with a leg which Archie and his groom had boiled and simmered into fineness. Archie had got the bay for ten pounds, as a nearly hopeless case.

"Will ye give him this, sir?" said Tom, the groom.

"We will so," returned his master.

It was so easy to say afterwards when the leg went that it had never been wrong with him.

Lightly Martin bought. Was he not dealing with a man and a gentleman? Equally lightly he paid without word of vets. or other unpleasant necessities.

Archie Dayly gave him a pound for luck, and some strong whisky, and wrung his hand with fervour.

"Isn't it a pity, now," said Tom, watching the motor go, "that the like of thim should iver larn sense."

Martin was busy that night. He sat and talked to Honora of his splendid hunters, so that it was through Jamesy and Peter that the news filtered to Ryan's ears.

"Three horses, sir, have arrived," said Ryan, next morning.

"Well?" said Martin happily.

"The brown, sir, grunts," said Ryan. "I

beckoned at him now and he did it. The grey is parrot-mouthed. The bay——" he drew back. "It is Timsy Neill's bay," he whispered, "that he was at up there for a year, and I with him . . ."

"For what?" breathed Martin.

"For his back tendon," said Ryan curtly. "One day's work, Misther Martin, and ye will see."

Martin said nothing. He went to the opening meet next day, and he rode the chestnut as second horse. But there he met some people who smiled when he talked of the Daylys, and looked comprehensively at the horses.

"Better have a good vet. there," said Sir James Bellew softly. "Better, Royce—just a word to a stranger."

Martin said nothing. His gently genial manner never changed towards Mr. Dayly junior. On that worthy's inquiring a little timidly for the bay, he was told that he had been sold at a good profit.

"A friend of mine tempted me," said Martin pleasantly. "The horse is doing splendidly in Kildare."

"Be jabbers! Is he now?" said Archie Dayly dolefully.

Sometimes Martin would go in to look at that bowed fore-leg, and the limping horse, but he said nothing. When the bay disappeared, went to pull a light trap, he did so by night, and no one save old Ryan knew his destination.

The horse with the curbs proved Martin's best purchase. He watched Honora's hunters with some

envy. Before November was over he had provided himself with three which could go, but he looked sometimes at an entry in his cheque book, and again at three lodgments in his bank book, and his eyes were thoughtful.

Cornelius Royce merely remarked that he had known Archie Dayly's father and grandfather, and if he had been at home that would have been enough.

Now one morning Martin's fancy was captured by a long-legged thoroughbred mare, called by the owner the "Flying Lark." Martin saw her scurry across a field as if she were going to win the National ; he watched her skim as driven scud over two low walls, and he bought her.

When she was groomed and fit, the mare was attractive ; she looked like something which might pick up a big race, and she was absolutely the worst animal on earth. She flew her banks, hit her walls, was completely careless as to falls, and died away in a mile. Two rides on her made Martin hand her over to a brave stable boy, and let him see what he would do.

It chanced that year that Mr. Archie Dayly wanted something smart and had not got it. For two years he had won the light weight Hunt Cup ; he had nothing for it now.

When Martin on the Lark came flying past him up the lane at Long Park, Archie's eyes brightened. A week later, the second time Martin tried the mare, she got over a wide ditch handsomely, and her

subsequent refusal at the next one which she laid her head on lovingly, was not seen by Mr. Dayly.

He came sweetly to Martin, asked pedigree and particulars. But Martin, always pleasant, was also reticent. Yes, she ought to race. No doubt she would ; she had come from a distance.

Archie nibbled round the Lark. Ryan's helpers and cousins were far too staunch to give her away. At his own fireside he told his large mother that he wished he could buy the mare.

"He might tire of her," boomed Maria Dayly, "as he tired of your three."

Mr. Dayly, junior, looked dubious.

One Friday, just before Christmas, they met at Five Cross Roads, and the Flying Lark was out.

A ringing fox kept them circling round two gorse coverts for an hour, and at last as he seemed inclined to go away, Martin struck out to the left of hounds, followed by the intrepid Timsy on the Lark.

"They are back !" called Timsy, "and that is a frightsome place oberight us. We should have kep' inside the wall."

The frightsome place was a bank high and narrow, with a big ditch on the taking-off side and uncertainty beyond.

Martin's curby hocked horse sprang lightly on, and shot easily off ; the Lark following with her head in the air, leapt at it with a will. Her first idea was to clear it ; seeing the ditch outside, she changed her mind.

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Ten minutes afterwards, Martin rode on to find the fox gone to ground, and everyone standing about. His face was set a little grimly.

To him, large-faced and ingratiating, came Mr. Archie Dayly.

The tale of the three sticks had somehow filtered out, principally through Honora, and men smiled a little looking at Martin's thoughtful face.

"It was about that light mare you have," began Archie. "You don't ride her, and if you had a wish to sell——"

"She is not worth anything," said Martin briefly; "she cannot jump."

"There was never one I could not make jump," said Archie simply. "It's patience that's needed, an' a rope. She can gallop. Now, if you cared to sell, or swop——"

A light came into Martin's eyes. He bent forward. "I have told you," he said, "that I do not want to sell her to you, and that I consider her worth *nothing*—not even ten shillings."

Archie thought he knew better. He had seen the Flying Lark travel; he would make her jump.

"I'd give you a bit for her then," he said. "Of course, she's not worth much."

Martin rode nearer. "I have told you," he repeated, "that she is not, but if you care to give me twenty pounds for her, she is yours."

The field gathered round, listening; they did not understand Martin.

It was a deal. Archie pulled out his pocket book;

he always carried money ; he took from it several greasy notes, and Martin gravely put them away.

“ A luck penny,” he said, producing half a crown. “ And you’ve all heard, I did not want to sell. In fact, if it had not been for the good bay horse you sold me, I would not have done it. ‘ One good turn,’ you know.”

Archie began to look a little uneasy.

“ And the mare,” he said, “ I can take her home now ? ”

“ You can,” said Martin equably, “ but you’d better send a cart. She’s dead down there, just behind the cottage. She broke her back at a high bank. I told you ten shillings was her value, didn’t I ? ”

“ Be—gonnes,” said Archie heavily.

“ And I to say he was a fool,” he murmured, as he rode away amid yells of laughter. No one pitied him.

“ It’s so very little back, too, out of a hundred and thirty for the bay,” said Martin softly. “ I gave him away.”

But to do Archie justice, he bore no malice. The only remark he made to Martin was that ’twas a loss they couldn’t take up the trade together.

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